



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

### Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

### About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>





**600053117N**





*In 2 vols., post 8vo., price 21s.,*

WITH NUMEROUS ILLUSTRATIONS FROM DRAWINGS FROM

LIFE BY THE AUTHOR,

TWO JOURNEYS TO JAPAN,

IN 1856—7

BY KINAHAN CORNWALLIS, ESQ.,

Author of

"THE NEW EL DORADO; OR BRITISH COLUMBIA," &c.

## THE FATE OF FOLLY.

By LORD B\*\*\*\*\*, Author of "Masters and Workmen," "The County Magistrate," &c. In 3 vols. (*Just ready.*)

---

## THIRTY-FIVE YEARS OF A DRAMATIC AUTHOR'S LIFE.

By EDWARD FITZBALL, Esq., Author of "The Crown Diamonds," "Maritana," &c. 2 vols., 21s. (*Now ready.*)

---

## HISTORICAL GLEANINGS AT HOME AND ABROAD.

By Mrs. FRANCES JAMIESON, Author of "History of France," "History of Spain," &c. 1 vol., 10s. 6d. (*Just ready.*)

---

## BHANA VAR,

A Romantic Poem; to which is added "FADLEEN," an Eastern Tale. By EDWARD FITZBALL, Esq. In 1 vol. 4to., splendidly illustrated. (*Just ready.*)

---

## THE INDIAN RELIGIONS.

By an INDIAN MISSIONARY. Price 7s. 6d.

---

## THE NEW EL DORADO.

Second Edition. By KINAHAN CORNWALLIS.

"The book is full of information."—*Morning Chronicle.*

"It is spiritedly written, and will amuse as well as instruct."

*Observer.*

"The book gives all the information which it is possible to obtain respecting the New Colony."—*Star.*

"Historical and descriptive of British Columbia. It will be found both entertaining and useful."—*Sunday Times.*

---

## JOURNAL OF THE FIRST FRENCH EMBASSY TO CHINA,

1698—1700. 1 vol. post 8vo., 10s. 6d. (*Just ready.*)

# MASTER AND PUPIL.

A T A L E.

BY MRS. MACKENZIE DANIEL,

Author of

"MY SISTER MINNIE," "FERNLEY MANOR," "OLD MAID OF THE  
FAMILY," "OUR GUARDIAN," &C.

I N T H R E E V O L U M E S

VOL. II.

London:

T. CAUTLEY NEWBY PUBLISHER

30, WELBECK STREET, CAVENDISH SQUARE.

1859.

[*The Right of Translation is reserved.*]

249. v. 363.





# MASTER AND PUPIL.

## CHAPTER I.

### MR. SEYMOUR AND THE VICARAGE.

MR. SEYMOUR having joined us before we were required to part from our first escort, it was not extraordinary that our leave takings with him should be in the calmest and most undemonstrative fashion. It was not extraordinary, because Mr. Seymour was a man whose very aspect forbade the expression of any kind of sentiment. Looking upon him for the first time you were

reminded of the frozen summit of Mont Blanc, or of the eternal snows of Norway, or of anything else that could convey to the mind an idea of unmitigated cold, or ice that could never thaw. He was not a plain man, as far as symmetry of features is concerned, nor was he even an old man, in whom one might have supposed the fires and ardour of youth had burnt out naturally. He was a man in the prime of life, with a look of Effie too about him, in spite of the changeless calm of his physiognomy, and this to me was the most painful part of all, because it seemed to be Effie without a soul, and destitute of that fresh, buoyant life and youth which constituted one of her greatest charms. There is an old fanciful theory, originating no doubt from the wild brain of some wonder-loving German, that every human being has his double somewhere or other in the universe, but admitting for a moment the possibility of such a

thing, I should still pronounce it a rule with an exception, and that exception the Reverend Mr. Seymour. Nothing should ever tempt me to believe that the double or exact similitude, physically and morally, of this man, could exist anywhere in or out of our material world.

Apart, however, from the really painful, because unnatural, apathy and coldness of his character, which the veriest child might have read in his face, Mr. Seymour was a perfect gentleman, and his reception of me, as his daughter's friend and guest, all that, having once looked on him, I could expect or desire. To Richard too he was polite, and even kind, as I found out when I understood better the limits of his outward manifestations of kindness, and to Effie (who cried at meeting him, and clung round his neck with unmistakable affection) he was as condescendingly indulgent as if she had

been a creature whose ways he did not understand, but endured, even with complacency, on account of her youth and innocence.

I was vexed and indignant with him when I saw that it never occurred to his great intellect (which must, however, have stooped to comprehend human emotions at one time), that Richard might like to say a few parting words to Effie alone. We had more than half an hour to wait at the station where he met us, and it would have been so easy to have afforded his future son-in-law this little indulgence; but nothing of the kind seemed to enter his learned head, for he kept Richard in conversation the whole time, and only left him the brief interval between the first sound of the whistle and our scrambling into the closely-packed carriages, to say farewell to us both.

The remaining half of our journey was to me as disagreeable as heat, fatigue, stupid com-

panions, and the constant contemplation of Mr. Seymour's face, because he sat exactly opposite, could make it.

But the end came at last, and just as a soft twilight was closing over the hills and woods of "leafy Kent," we were safely deposited at the door of the oldest, grayest, quaintest, and altogether most romantic-looking vicarage I had ever seen or dreamt of.

Effie's tears, which had been so lately dried, began to flow again at the first sight of her country home; but Mr. Seymour, as he lifted her out of the little carriage which had met us at the Lismore station, told her not to be a baby, as she had now a guest to take care of and entertain.

Poor dear Effie! she might have cried on, if it would have done her any good, for me; but I felt too much in awe of this stately father of hers to utter a word at present, and it was an immense relief to me when a fat, good-tempered

little housekeeper bustled upon the scene, and proposed taking us up-stairs at once.

After changing our dusty attire, and making ourselves otherwise presentable, the same pleasant old lady conducted us into a delightful low-ceilinged parlour, where a tea table was spread that would have rejoiced the heart of a gourmand, and at which she begged us to seat ourselves without further delay, adding her opinion that we must be just ready to drop from want of something to eat.

“But shall we not wait for Mr. Seymour?” I asked, wondering that he had not yet made his appearance.

Both Effie and the housekeeper laughed at my suggestion, but it was the latter who enlightened me as to the cause of their mirth.

“Bless your heart, miss, you’d have to wait long enough if you waited for master. Why, he has never taken a meal with his family, except

sometimes when a friend has dropped in about supper time, since I can remember, and I've lived with him now, on and off, these twenty-five years."

In much astonishment I turned to Effie, who, while she loaded my plate with the best of the good things before us, said rather apologetically:

"You see, poor papa is so devoted to study, and so entirely indifferent to society, that he would have been no companion for me, even had he always had me with him. And dear nurse here (for she was my nurse in days gone by) has taken care that I should never feel dull. When we are quite alone we have our meals together, don't we, nursie?"

I no longer wondered that Effie's heart had expanded under the first breath of genuine human love, and that she had mistaken the pleasure and gratitude, excited by Richard Errol's



strong attachment, for a reciprocity of the same warm and deathless feeling.

“My poor lamb!” exclaimed the housekeeper, applying a corner of her snowy apron to her eyes, “you have always been contented and happy with the very little I could do for you in this dull old place. I was glad enough when they took you away to London for awhile, though to speak the truth, you don’t look much stronger or healthier than when I saw you last. But if I may make so bold, how did you leave the gentleman and all his family?”

“Quite well, thank you, nurse,” said Effie, with an affectionate smile at the old lady; “and so you don’t think I am looking well.”

“For certain sure I don’t, Miss Effie, but we must do our best to fatten you up again now. As you won’t be alone any longer, and begging the young lady’s pardon, I hope she’ll be able to make herself comfortable here, and not take

offence at master's keeping so much away. As I was saying, Miss Effie, you'll have a companion now to take long walks with over the hills and in the pine woods this fine autumn weather, but you are neither of you eating half enough. Try these cakes of my own baking, with some marmalade or preserve; there's plenty of all these things at the Vicarage."

We were not permitted to leave the table until we had tasted of everything, and satisfied the kind old lady that at least we appreciated all the dainties she had provided for us. Then as there was just sufficient daylight remaining to discern external objects, we wrapped ourselves in warm shawls, and went out to have one turn in the garden.

What a garden it was! Never before or since have I seen such brilliant flowers, such emerald turf, such laden fruit trees, and such fanciful, intricate serpentine walks, in which one was sure

to get lost continually if only for the pleasure of finding one's way out again.

I told Effie I was enchanted to that degree that I did not know how to express my raptures, and she, with her gentle, loving smile, turned to kiss me fondly, and to say she hoped, since I liked her home so much, I should stay for ages with her.

We only saw Mr. Seymour once more that evening, when he looked in at the parlour for a moment to beg me to excuse his unsociable habits, and to recommend us both to go to bed early.

This we were quite disposed to do; and after receiving dear Effie's assurance that she felt strengthened already by her native air, and anticipated a night of sound rest, I left her to seek the repose of my own pillow, and to sleep so deliciously that it was almost pain to awake.

To me the delight of being once more really in the country, and such country as this, soft, smiling,

undulating, and richly wooded—was so exquisite that the few first days I seemed to walk amongst the clouds, and took note of little besides my own purely selfish enjoyment. It mattered not one bit to me that Mr. Seymour kept entirely aloof from us, hiding his strangely freezing visage amidst volumes of musty books that were more to him than any flesh and blood companions. Nor that Effie and myself had communion with any higher order of intelligence than that of the old housekeeper, who exerted all her energies to make us what she called ‘comfortable’—nor that light literature of every kind was a thing unknown at Lismore Vicarage, nor that the old piano was so curiously out of tune, that none but a deaf person could have endured to sweep its chords. I say all this mattered not to me, while I had nature’s glories to exult in, and my darling Effie, with gradually brightening cheek, to share my enjoyment.

We used to go out immediately after breakfast with our sketch books (which, by the bye, were rarely opened), and a little basket containing our lunch, and having reached some previously chosen spot, either on the breezy hills, or in some quiet glade of those thick, dark woods which I loved so especially, we would sit down for hours talking or remaining silent as we felt disposed, and (I answer at least for myself) wishing for nothing but a continuance of present happiness.

Even when I emerged somewhat from my first state of selfish abstraction, I had no reason to suppose that Effie was looking back regretfully, or pining for the impossible. It is true her spirits had lost the buoyancy they possessed when first I knew her, that her laugh was not so frequent, and her enthusiasm about little things less readily awakened than once it had been; but she was still habitually cheerful, and appeared to have none of that yearning for soli-

tude which distinguishes the sorrowful and the unhappy.

While the finest of the Autumn weather continued, her strength perceptibly increased, and earnestly did the old housekeeper and myself rejoice over the favourable symptoms, and prognosticate a complete recovery, before the winter set in.

Nevertheless, there were times when that low, and apparently insignificant little cough would return, and then, remembering Mrs. Errol's anxious looks when she first heard it, I could not help being watchful and uneasy.

It struck me also that there was a growing earnestness in Effie about spiritual things, a boldness in speaking of them to me, and urging them on my attention, which had certainly been lacking during our former intercourse. I was not displeased at this on my own account, for I was beginning, intellectually at least, to think

deeply on the subject of evangelical religion, but regarding it as a sign that she still retained the impressions of an early death that had been avowed in her journal, I could not but tremble at the change I observed, and wish to see less of the 'saint' about her.

In accordance with the promise I had made in Bloomsbury Square, I wrote every week to one or other of the family, and gave them the best account I could of our darling's health and spirits; but it happened once that some of my own nervousness crept unawares into a letter I was penning to Catherine, and two days after I received the following from Richard himself.

" MY DEAR MISS HEATHCOTT,

" Let no mistaken kindness withhold you from communicating the simple truth concerning your friend and ours. That her health is more than

commonly delicate we *all* know, but delicacy does not necessarily imply disease. Should any decided symptom of this last have appeared since you both left London, I trust to your friendship, as well as to your conscientiousness, to be perfectly candid on the subject. You must remember, as I strive to do, that all our wilful blindness, all our cowardly shrinkings from even the pictured face of earthly sorrow, will avail us nothing when this instrument, in the hands of *unerring* wisdom, is really commissioned to invade our hearts and homes.

“Effie’s own letters are few and brief, but I have rejoiced in them, for the gracious spirit they manifest. We look to you, however, for all details concerning her temporal condition.

“With sincere esteem,

“I am, my dear Miss Heathcott,

“Yours faithfully,

“RICHARD ERROL.”





As it happened to be one of dear Effie's best and brightest days when I had to answer this letter, my reply was rather calculated to dispel than increase the fears I had previously excited. I had no reason to apprehend positive disease. There was no consumption in the family, and therefore I felt justified in saying that I believed my own anxiety often led me to fancy dangers where none existed; and to add to that Effie's old nurse entertained the most sanguine hopes concerning her.

It was from Richard's answer to this letter, rather than from the first he had written, that I gathered how overwhelming to him had been the thought that the cup so near his lips, might be dashed down for ever.

## CHAPTER II.

## ANXIETIES AROUSED.

ABOUT a month after our arrival at Lismore, there occurred a brief season of cold and rainy weather, and it was during this time that my fears concerning Effie's health first took a distinct and settled form. The cough, which had always been to me a source of uneasiness, not only returned itself, but brought with it symptoms of langour and debility that I regarded as most fatal omens. The poor girl saw that I was thoroughly roused and alarmed, and whatever

might have been her own secret presentiments, she did her best, by constant cheerfulness, to keep me from dwelling on the subject; and while we were unavoidably restricted to in-door amusements, manifested a patience and ingenuity in providing them, for which I should never have given her credit.

It was with some difficulty that I managed a private interview with her old nurse, for Effie seemed to suspect that we talked about her, and to be bent on hindering it as much as possible—but one day the rare event occurred of Mr. Seymour requesting his daughter's presence in the study, and scarcely had she obeyed the summons when I ran down to the housekeeper's room, and surprised the dear old lady in the midst of labelling several hundred little white pots of jam.

“Mrs. Allen,” I began eagerly, “I have been wanting to speak to you alone these several

days past, only Miss Effie never gives me an opportunity. Don't you think she seems much worse lately?"

"Well, no, Miss; I can't say that I've noticed much change in the dear child. She seems merry and happy enough with you, and as for that bit of a cough, it is only the damp weather."

"Oh, no, indeed you are mistaken. If you saw as much of her as I do, you would think differently. I am *certain* her lungs are affected, and every day she is getting weaker. Do, my dear Mrs. Allen speak to her father and let their medical man be sent for."

"But la, bless you, Miss Heathcott, what's the good of speaking to master. He'd never believe there was anything the matter if I made ever such a fuss. Nobody could persuade him that poor missis was dying, even after the

doctors had given her up; he's not like other people and won't be persuaded into a thing against his will."

"But when Mrs. Seymour did die, surely he must have acknowledged his error and his obstinacy then."

"Not a bit of it. He shut himself in his study, for a week took scarcely any nourishment, and at the end of that time came out and went on just the same as usual, except that we fancied he was a trifle colder and more absent in his ways than he had been before."

"But you believe him at least to be fond of his daughter, don't you?"

"I suppose so, since he has never denied her anything she's wanted, from her babyhood; but it's a fondness I cannot understand, no more than I can understand master himself."

"Well, if *you* will not speak to him *I* will do so, Mrs. Allen, for I am pledged to give Miss

Effie's friends in London every information concerning her health, and as there is nothing doubtful about *their* fondness for her, I wish to be quite sure that my fears are not groundless before I alarm these dear kind people."

"Of course, miss, but I can't help thinking you're over fidgetty on the subject. Why *should* Miss Effie be consumptive? Look at her father, a man who has never had a day's illness in his life, and hasn't a grey hair in his head even now."

"But the mother died young, Mrs. Allen, and if not of consumption what was it?"

"Well, nobody seemed to know for certain, a kind of low fever that couldn't be got rid of and kept wasting, the poor lady, day by day. Between ourselves I don't think she had led a very happy life with master."

"It must at least have been a dreary one, if he was as unsociable then as he is now."

"About the same I fancy, and missis was na-

turally gay and fond of society. I thought sometimes that if she had liked books and learning, and so been more of a companion for master, they might both have been happier and she have lived the longer."

"Possibly; but about Miss Effie, what do you advise?"

"Well, miss, if you've any inclination to speak to master, I don't see but what it may do good. Anyhow if the doctor comes it will settle your mind on the subject."

"Then you have really no serious fears yourself, Mrs. Allen?"

"Goodness forbid I should have!" exclaimed the old woman with emotion; "that precious lamb is as dear to me as if she was my own. It would break my heart to lose her."

Poor Mrs. Allen! as if this fact would prevent the accomplishment of Effie's destiny, were it indeed what my fears forboded.

When I returned to the parlour I found it still untenanted, and rejoiced that I had so successfully managed the interview without the necessity of exciting suspicion or wonder about its object. In a few minutes Effie joined me, bearing in her hand a heap of letters and papers, and looking amusingly business-like and important.

“Whatever is it, my child?” I asked, relieving her of a portion of her burden. “Has your papa constituted you his secretary at a salary of nothing per annum?”

She smiled and sat down beside me.

“He has given me lots of work to do for him at any rate, and as it is the first time in my life such a thing has happened, I don’t think I ought to be very exacting about payment.”

“Perhaps not under the circumstances; but let me see the amount of this required labour.”



“ Oh, there is a great deal, but papa said I might ask you to help me. The fact is he has involved himself in a long correspondence on some abstruse theological subject with the editor of our county newspaper, and these dry looking documents are merely the first rough sketches of the thoughts he intends embodying in the progress of this learned warfare. He wishes, however, to preserve them distinct from the printed letters in which they will be introduced, and I am therefore to copy them all in a neat, round, legible hand as quickly as possible.”

“ But, Effie, you know how writing always tires you. There, you are coughing in the very anticipation of the labour. Never mind, I will do the whole myself.”

“ Oh, Dora, what would papa say?”

“ Leave that to me. I suppose I write well enough for him.”

“ You write beautifully I know, but he would

be ashamed of your having so much trouble on his account, and think me very lazy into the bargain."

"Again I repeat, leave all the consequences to me. I undertake the work, and I will perform it in a few days. In the meanwhile, Miss Effie, you touch it if you dare!"

I kept my promise, and on the morning of the third day after I had received the papers (which by the bye were written with an earnestness, a depth of thought, and a beauty of language that made them interesting in spite of their subject), I gathered all my little heap into a neat bundle, and fraught with a graver errand than even this amount of learning comprehended, I presented myself at Mr. Seymour's door.

As much surprise as could be expressed by a countenance which rarely expressed anything, was depicted on Mr. Seymour's face as on receiving permission to enter, I stood within the

room, gazing with a very artificial courage at its occupant.

Believing that I understood the reverend gentleman somewhat better than his old servant professed to do, I had determined to be as brief, dry, and matter-of-fact as possible in what I had to say to him.

The first thing was to deliver up the result of my labours, which I did with the simple observation that I hoped he would find my copying correct and legible.

"But what is the meaning of this?" he asked, looking hastily over the manuscript; "it is all in one handwriting, and that *not* my daughter's. Why did not Effie perform the task herself?"

"Because I forbade her doing so. Stooping fatigues her too much, and to me the labour was nothing."

"I at least have been the gainer, Miss Heath-

cott," continued mine host, referring once more to the papers, "for you write beautifully, and what is more, do not omit to punctuate your manuscript, which my daughter would never think of doing. But I am grieved that you should have had all this trouble on my account, and I shall certainly read Effie a lecture on her indolence."

Now was my time.

"Effie is far from indolent," I said, declining the chair Mr. Seymour handed to me; "but she is quite incapable of much exertion, and having watched her most anxiously for some weeks past, I have come to the conclusion that her state of health is very precarious indeed, and ought no longer to be trifled with. Her cough alone is enough to alarm those who understand the premonitory symptoms of consumption; and besides this, she has been, since the commencement of

the damp weather, so weak that it tires her even to go up and down stairs."

Although I could detect no change in the father's countenance as I spoke thus plainly and pitilessly, I fancied that in the beginning a slight shiver had convulsed his apparently iron frame, as if the very thought of having his hearth invaded a second time by the grim tyrant, who mocked at his calmness and incredulity, filled him with a sickening dread; but be this as it might, there was no emotion perceptible in his voice, as looking up at the conclusion of my long speech, he said :

" I thank you sincerely, Miss Heathcott, for the interest you manifest in my little girl. I am not easily alarmed by slight colds or temporary debility myself, but if you deem it advisable let Mr. Davison be sent for at once. He brought Effie into the world, and having attended her for

measles and whooping-cough, ought to know her constitution."

"Will you give orders to have him sent for to-day?"

"Whenever you please; but what does Mrs. Allen think?"

"She shuts her eyes to the truth, just because she has no moral strength to contemplate it. But if we were all to do this, Effie might perish without a single hand being stretched forth to save her."

"Oh, you must not talk of her perishing, Miss Heathcott"—(this time the smooth brow visibly contracted, and I thought he was getting angry with me). "She has hitherto had a tolerable share of health and strength, and why should we magnify a passing indisposition into approaching disease. At the worst, I have no doubt that removal to a warmer climate would effect a complete cure."

“Mr. Davison will decide this; but supposing such should be his earnest recommendation, could you take her abroad?”

It must have been such a perfectly new experience for Mr. Seymour to be talked to and questioned in this manner by a comparative stranger, with whom he had never exchanged half a dozen voluntary words, that I could not wonder at his regarding me with some appearance of curiosity—just as he might have looked up from one of his most learned compositions at a little mouse who should have ventured to approach to within a few inches of his august toe—but from his reply I gathered nothing but what was natural and proper for the occasion.

“I should assuredly make an effort to do so, whatever it cost me; but I anticipate no such desperate remedy being prescribed.”

“But you will send for the medical man to-day?”

"If it will not be troubling you too much, you may give the order to Mrs. Allen yourself, and when he has seen Effie, let him come here and speak to me."

"I will not fail to tell him, and now I must bid you good morning, Mr. Seymour. Effie will wonder why I am staying from her so long."

"I must again thank you for your friendship for my child, as well as for this admirably executed work. Good morning, Miss Heathcott."

I did not disguise from Effie that I had been persuading her father to have immediate medical advice for her, and it relieved me to find that she was less chagrined at my zeal than I had expected. Perhaps there were times when the poor girl clung to life, and still indulged the hope that it might be prolonged, or perhaps she was really growing weary of striving to hide the progress of her disease from those around her, and thought



that one great woe would be past when all should know the worst.

Mr. Davison came that afternoon, and was closeted for half an hour with the patient and her old nurse. How Mr. Seymour felt during this interval, whether his famous controversy progressed, or whether his pen lay idle by his side, whether he thought of the young wife who was sleeping in the churchyard, and prayed that the fair, loving flower she had left might yet be spared to him, I cannot even guess. I know only that, for myself, I paced my bed room in fierce and sickening impatience, and tried, in sheer desperation, to realize what the world would be to me without my darling Effie.

## CHAPTER III.

## THE TYRANT'S FOOTSTEPS IN THE DISTANCE.

I WAYLAID the doctor as he came out of the drawing-room, and prepared to walk with him as far as Mr. Seymour's study door.

My face must have expressed all I wanted to say, for before I could speak he gave me clearly and patiently the information I sought.

"Miss Seymour's health is certainly in a more unsatisfactory state than I should have expected to find it, considering the few months the disease

can have been growing. When she left Lismore early in summer, there was no appearance of anything of the kind. Now, I grieve sincerely to discover, her left lung is seriously affected, and the natural fragility of her constitution is altogether against us in any efforts we may make to arrest the progress of the malady."

"But is there *any* hope?"

"My dear young lady, you ask me a difficult question, but I will be frank with you. There is just that hope which death only destroys, for you must have heard or read of cases where the final issue of a malady has confounded all the established theories, and contradicted all the former experience of the most skilful physicians, giving rise to that old-fashioned proverb, 'where there's life there's hope.' Beyond this I should not be justified in encouraging you."

As soon as my choking voice would permit, I said:

"And you will be equally frank with Mr. Seymour?"

An odd smile played for a moment on the doctor's lips, as he replied :

"I might safely be yet more candid, were that possible, without fearing to excite any considerable alarm. Mr. Seymour, in spite of his eloquent preaching, seems to disbelieve in the mortality of his own family at least. But death does not wait for a welcome."

"And what is to be done for Effie?"

We were standing at the study door.

"She will take regularly the medicine I shall send, avoid the slightest exposure to damp or cold, and when the weather gets fine again, as it will soon, a little moderate horse exercise would be desirable. I will speak to her father about a pony there is in the village for sale."

"But would not a warmer climate be bene-

ficial? Mr. Seymour told me he would take her away if it was necessary."

"If the patient wished it, I should say yes; but Miss Effie has begged me earnestly not to send her away, and where this decided reluctance exists, the benefits would be very doubtful."

"My poor Effie!—"

And leaving the good-natured doctor abruptly, I ran again to my own room, and really wished that my heart would break in that long, passionate, rebellious fit of crying.

But as it did not break, an inevitable calmness at length succeeded, and I had bathed my eyes and smoothed my hair in preparation for going down to my darling, when a gentle knock at the bolted door warned me that she had herself come to seek me.

"Oh, you naughty Dora!" she exclaimed, throwing her dear arms round my neck and

kissing me wherever the traces of my tears appeared, "why are you too so foolish? I have been for the last hour trying in vain to comfort that silly old nurse of mine, and it is quite plain that unless you come and help me to cheer her up we shall none of us, not even papa, get a bit of dinner to-day. Come, now, be good and brave for my sake."

In spite of her efforts to speak cheerfully and lightly, the blue eyes were very liquid, and a bright spot on either cheek told that the confirmation of her long hidden fears had not been received without much excitement.

I went down with her, and left her no more that day, for although I knew I ought to write to Richard, I dreaded the task of destroying all his hopes so intensely, that any excuse for putting it off was eagerly accepted.

Mr. Seymour had gone out immediately after the doctor's visit, and it was towards evening

when he came in again. We had caused a fire to be lighted in our little parlour, and were sitting beside it waiting for tea, not talking much, because we were both unequal to it at present, but occasionally uttering a few words that were intended to be hopeful, though the spirit of hope would never have owned them, when Effie's father abruptly opened the door, and without even waiting for an invitation came and seated himself between us.

Effie's first impulse was to embrace him tenderly, and to hide her pale face for some minutes on his shoulder that he might not see how easily her weak nerves were shaken. I should have left them together, but that Mr. Seymour, probably guessing the object of my rising, said quickly :

“ Pray don't go, Miss Heathcott, or Effie will never welcome me to her fireside again.”

“ If I did not know that you have had no

dinner, dear papa," added the daughter, struggling so bravely with her tears that they went back conquered to their stronghold, "I should beg you to stay and have a cup of tea with us. It would be such a treat to me."

"Then I will stay, Effie; and Mrs. Allen shall give me an egg instead of my dinner, for which, indeed, having waited beyond my usual time, my appetite is gone."

"Oh, thank you, dear papa, I am so glad. Dora, let us make up the fire, and show by our powers of rendering ourselves agreeable, that we know how to appreciate the society of our honoured guest."

I knew that she meant this playfulness as a hint to me that I must throw off the gloom I had all day been indulging, but even had that, under certain circumstances, been possible, Mr. Seymour was assuredly not the man to facilitate any efforts of the kind. Not that his own



countenance, or the tones of his voice, or the words that he spoke, betrayed the slightest change in his usual torpid condition; but this condition itself, coupled with the fact of his coming to us to-night, and also with that of his having been out to purchase the pony Mr. Davison had told him of, seemed to present such a strange contradiction, and to suggest such a wide field for speculation concerning the origin of his apparent heartlessness, that my mind in seeking to get a glimpse of the truth, took even a deeper tone of dejection, and I selfishly left my poor Effie to the unassisted task of entertaining her incomprehensible father.

It was only just before he left us that he made the slightest allusion to the one great and painful interest of the day, and then even he approached the subject with so evident a reluctance, and appeared so thankful when the few words were spoken and over, that I could not help suspect-

ing he felt and believed otherwise than these words would seem to imply. He only said, as his daughter was kissing him and wishing him a fond good night:

“Effie, you must not put too much faith in the croaking of old Mr. Davison, whose experience, after all, has been very limited. Keep up your spirits, my dear girl, and if you like to have Richard Errol or any of his family down to stay for a week or so, I have no doubt Mrs. Allen can find beds for them. The pony will come home to-morrow, and as I have hired another for your friend, you can ride together every fine warm day.”

He waited for no more thanks or words of any sort, but shaking hands with me, and bidding Effie go to bed soon, left us to return to his solitary study, and perhaps to forget amidst his loved pursuits all that for a brief space had taken him away from them.

"Effie dear," I said when we were alone, "shall I ask Richard to pay us a visit when I write to-morrow?"

Her answer was slow in coming, and uttered in an unsteady voice when it came.

"It is probable, Dora, that if you write faithfully he will come without a special invitation, but you may mention what papa has just said."

The dreaded letter was written the next day, it took me two hours to compose, although far from a lengthy effusion, and what I suffered between its departure and the time an answer could arrive I leave to the imagination of those who have been called upon to communicate to loving hearts tidings that they know will go nigh to quench the sunlight of those hearts for ever.

## CHAPTER IV.

## RICHARD'S SORROW.

WE had not long to wait for the fine weather, for the very next afternoon the sun shone out again brilliantly, a soft breeze dispersing the dampness of the air, and rendering the atmosphere most delightful and exhilarating.

The ponies arrived while we were wishing they would come, and Mr. Seymour, being informed of the fact, laid aside his books, and not only assisted us to mount, but advised us as to

the route we should take, and saw himself, in conjunction with the old housekeeper, whose eyes were still red with crying, that Effie was well wrapt and guarded against the possibility of catching cold, which she assured them with her sweet, grateful smile, there was no fear of her doing.

We rode along a winding, picturesque road, under shelter of the green hills on which we had so often sat during the long sunny hours, on our first arrival at Lismore. Effie's spirits, which had been gradually brightening since morning, became almost buoyant as the gentle exercise set the languid blood in motion, and her docile little steed cantered lightly under his easy burden.

Sometimes for a few minutes I too could forget the shadows that surrounded us, and awake to the delicious enjoyment in which my companion was revelling; but presently a tormenting ima-

gination would picture with peculiar vividness the scene in Bloomsbury Square on the arrival of my letter, and instead of green hills and clustering trees, and lanes where the honeysuckle and wild rose filled the air with fragrance, I would see the crowded dusty London streets, and distinguish amidst the hurrying masses one solitary man walking to his usual duties with a crushed heart, that writhed none the less under its sufferings because they were hidden from the common gaze.

But all this, of course, and much besides of a more purely selfish nature, I kept secret from my companion, who talked and even laughed with some of her old gaiety, and seemed really to be inhaling life and health from the soft, breezy air.

"Oh, if this weather does but last," she said, as at length, in obedience to the strict orders we

had received, I proposed retracing our steps, "I shall at least have abundance of enjoyment to make up for a little pain."

Surely if she had known anything of the depth of Richard's love for her, she would have trembled, as I did, at the fear of his despair.

The next day and the next again we were enabled to repeat our ride, and each time to go a little farther, and to stay out a little longer, for the autumn had now set in warm and dry, and the land was filled with the glory of yellow harvest fields, and reddening woods, and all sweet sights and sounds that Nature's children love with such unchanging devotion.

It was quite wonderful the improvement which in these few days had taken place in Effie. The father praised the doctor, and the doctor praised the pony, and Mrs. Allen dried her eyes, and in the plenitude of her satisfaction praised us all; but neither Effie, the doctor, nor myself were de-

ceived by the flattering symptoms, though we rejoiced in them as a positive mercy, scarcely to have been hoped for under the circumstances.

I ought to have received an answer to my letter on the third morning, but as none arrived, I made up my mind and told Effie that Richard would surely come. She heard me without much perceptible emotion, but was more thoughtful and less talkative during our ride that day than she had been on either of the preceding ones.

We remained out, however, even beyond the last moment of our allotted time, and had to quicken our usual pace in returning, that Mr. Seymour might not chide us for imprudent delay.

Hitherto he had always been standing at the garden gate waiting to receive us on our arrival, but on this occasion we missed him from his post, and Effie had just remarked that she hoped he was not angry at our being a little late, when two gentlemen came quickly from the house, one



of whom, a few steps in advance of Mr. Seymour, I recognised as Richard Errol.

A single hurried glance sufficed to convince me that my letter had done its work, and that not all the sanguine prognostications which the father had doubtless been uttering for their mutual benefit had lifted from Richard's heart an atom of the crushing weight the certainty of approaching desolation had laid upon it.

Had it been otherwise, Effie's blooming cheeks (for she was flushed both from her rapid canter and the surprise that awaited her), as he helped her from her horse, would surely have brightened his own sad countenance a little. But no such effect was produced, and therefore I knew that under that quiet exterior a very hurricane of grief was raging, and that it must be a more than mortal power that kept it within bounds.

As soon as Effie and myself had changed our dresses, we went down to tea, at which meal Mr.

Seymour again joined us, and did more than his part in promoting conversation and encouraging cheerfulness. But never surely were any laudable and persevering efforts crowned with such ill success. Richard's nature was one that could suffer no silence even to the extremity of human fortitude, but it was not one that could or would under any circumstances condescend to act a part. There was reality in the woe whose bitterness he was already tasting, there was reality in the disease that was wasting the life of the fair young creature he had hoped to cherish in his bosom through long years of love and happiness; there was reality in the passionate devotion he had bestowed upon her, and what had he to do with seemings of any kind.

Nor was it wonderful that the shadow of his great grief should fall on Effie and myself, and render us wholly incapable of seconding Mr. Seymour's exertions.

Poor Mrs. Allen, who hovered about all the time the tea-things were on the table, looked unfeignedly wretched when she saw how little her creature comforts were appreciated, and sighed deeply as she took most of them away untasted. Effie had indeed eaten more than any of us, but then her father had loaded her plate, and with her usual sweet docility she had done her best to please him.

I was glad and thankful when the cheerless meal was over and I could get away to my own room, for independently of the extreme dejection Richard's presence inspired, I felt that this first evening ought to be sacred to him and Effie, and sincerely hoped that Mr. Seymour would feel the same.

Once indeed the daring project occurred to my mind of asking him to take me for a walk that I might insure for Richard a few hours of undisturbed communion with her he was so soon to lose

for ever, but the necessary courage for so bold a step failed me at the critical moment, and hearing the reverend gentleman go into his study, I trusted that all would be right.

In the course of the evening Mrs. Allen came to my room, and told me that Mr. Errol was to stay at the Vicarage for a week or longer, and that after he went back, one or two of his sisters were coming in his place.

The old woman hoped it would do her darling good, but shook her head doubtfully as she referred to Mr. Richard's grave solemn looks, which were enough to put dismal thoughts into anybody's head.

"But how can he look otherwise?" I asked, quite indignant that his right to mourn should be called in question, "we must remember, Mrs. Allen, that however dear Miss Effie may be to us, she must be still dearer to him whose wife she was to have been."

“ And may be still, if her spirits are kept up and not frightened all out of her, poor dear. I wish that doctor with his nasty fishy oil and his nonsense had never come nigh the place.”

“ But see how much better she is since his first visit, Mrs. Allen, and though a permanent cure may be impossible, it is unquestionably a great point to have suffering relieved and the capacity for enjoying life in some degree restored.”

“ Well for my part, miss, I hate to look at the dark side of things,” exclaimed the devoted old servant; and illustrating this remark by bursting into a violent fit of crying, she left me abruptly to my own less noisy, but not less real sorrow.

## CHAPTER V.

## MINE HOST IN WANT OF A SECRETARY.

WHAT words were spoken or confessions made during that long evening, whose quiet solemnity no one ventured to obtrude upon, I never knew, though from its results I conjectured a great deal.

If Effie had at length laid bare her heart, with all its weakness, all its involuntary treachery towards him who had ever been so true to her, she had not at least humbled herself in vain,

for the guileless heart thus opened, took in at this eleventh hour the sorrow stricken man whose strong love no longer hid itself under a chilling reserve; but, seeing the cruel graveyard in the distance, came forth in its might and power (alas! that these were so circumscribed) to shield and bless, while yet it could, the sweet withering flower, for which earth with all its varied resources had no abiding shelter.

I was not jealous now, though Effie, in learning to appreciate the priceless devotion which hitherto she had not even understood or believed in, seemed for awhile to live but for the one sole object of compensating to Richard for her blindness and infatuation. I was not jealous, because I too recognized his lawful claims, and saw that, in spite of the coming darkness, they both enjoyed a pure and elevated happiness in the perfect love and confidence established between them; and doubtless in the certainty they both

felt of being reunited in that land where death and parting can never enter.

And yet it was a mournful thing, especially to those whose visions of eternity were confused and vague, to watch these two unselfish hearts clinging so tenderly and yearningly together, and striving each to hide its own peculiar pain that the other might be cheered and strengthened. Sometimes it was evident that Richard's courage had quite given way before any unusual symptoms of physical weakness in his fading treasure, and always on such occasions I discovered in Effie a resolute cheerfulness, an even playfully reproachful tenderness, which if it did not succeed in chasing the shadows from his brow, at least shamed him for letting her observe them.

I seldom, by my presence, robbed them of one moment of that intercourse which I knew must be so sacred and precious to them both. Even the rides I had given up since Richard's arrival, and



although they often asked, and sometimes even urged me most affectionately to join them, I preferred finding my own amusements during the long days, and learning what life would be when Effie was taken from me.

Of Mr. Seymour I saw nothing during the first week of Richard's stay at the Vicarage. I thought he was perhaps beginning to open his wilful eyes to the true state of the case, as regarded Effie, and that he lacked courage to see either her or any of us often. Mrs. Allen said he seemed busier with his books than ever, and scarcely gave himself time to eat his meals when she took them to him.

Twice during this period he had called Mr. Davison into his study as that gentleman was retiring after a visit to Effie—but what passed on these occasions nobody knew, and his complete isolation seemed to warrant us in thinking little about him.

But one day, when I had taken my work and a book into the garden, and was just considering whether I should establish myself under an old walnut tree which had a seat built round it, or on a sunny bank, where I could catch every passing breeze, I suddenly espied the master of the house emerging slowly from one of the serpentine walks and looking so extremely forlorn and desolate, that my heart was moved to pity, and laying aside book and work, I rose to meet him.

His salutation, though scrupulously polite, convinced me that he was not in want of companionship, but I was feeling wretchedly dull myself, and having been alone since morning, I longed for the sound of a human voice, even though it might be a harsh one.

Observing that I lingered, he took occasion to ask me how Effie seemed to-day, and when I expected her home from her ride.

I told him that it was one of her good days, and that they would probably be out till the sun went down, as the longer she could remain in the air without taking cold, the better she always was afterwards.

"But how is it that you never go with her now?" he asked, beginning to walk on leisurely in apparent resignation to the society I had inflicted on him; I, of course, keeping by his side.

"Because I think they must like better being alone, and it is right they should be."

"But it must be a cheerless life for you in this dull old house. Are you fond of reading?"

"That depends upon the books I am able to obtain, but even without books, I am generally able to amuse myself."

This sufficed as an opening for a tolerably familiar conversation, in the course of which I dis-

covered that if Mr. Seymour had no heart, he had an intellect and an imagination of no ordinary standard.

What discoveries he made, if any, concerning *my* capacities, I am, of course, ignorant, but when at the end of nearly an hour he looked at his watch and said his recreation time was over, he added courteously that all the books he possessed were at my disposal, and that I had only to go into the study and choose for myself.

In thanking him gratefully for this offer (which however, I had no idea of accepting) I told him that if I could be useful in copying letters or anything else for him, I should be most happy thus to employ my leisure.

He bowed with much grace (for he really was a graceful and accomplished man) but repeated that his time was up now, and that he would give me an answer the next day.

The next day as soon as Effie and Richard

had left the house, Mrs. Allen brought me word that "master" would be glad to speak with me in his study.

I obeyed the flattering summons with as little delay as possible, and found Mr. Seymour with a pile of untidy, blotted manuscript before him.

"For me," I said to myself.

And the long-indulged spirit of indolence within me gave a growl of dissatisfaction which I can only hope was not reflected on my features.

"You see, Miss Heathcott," he began, directing my attention with a kind of deprecating smile to the prepared papers, "I am going to take prompt advantage of the generous offer you made me yesterday. The truth is I am collecting the scattered thoughts and reflections of many by-gone years, into something like shape and order, with a view to possible publication at some future time—if I have a future—and a little assistance

in copying just now would be a real boon to me. The only difficulty is, that from the imperfect, and often illegible writing, the copyist would require to be with me in this room, and I know not how to ask you to make such a sacrifice."

To say that this proposal did not take me by surprise, would be as untrue as to state that I relished the idea of spending, perhaps several hours of every day working hard by the side of this singular man, and obtaining no other reward than a glance of cold approbation from those slowly moving eyes, which seemed made to reach everything but the human heart.

But I put the best face I could upon the matter, and replied that if I could really be useful, I should consider the time given either here or elsewhere no sacrifice.

He took me at my word, and asked me when I could begin.

"To-morrow if you please. This afternoon I

have a headache, and I am going for a walk on the hills."

"Then let Mrs. Allen accompany you. It is too far for you to walk alone."

I smiled to myself as I thought this anxiety was at least as much for his own future secretary as for Miss Heathcott, his daughter's friend,

But perhaps I did him injustice.

Effie seemed rather amused when she heard what I had undertaken, but feared it would tire me very much, and that I should leave Lismore all the sooner for having had such an uninteresting task imposed upon me.

Richard, however, saw it in a different light; he thought I was growing low spirited from being so much alone, and since I refused to be with them (I am sure in his heart he thanked me for this) it was as well that I should be with Mr. Seymour, who at any rate would not bore me with unprofitable conversation.

"He will never speak to her at all," said Effie, "unless it is to give some directions about the copying. Poor dear Dora! I really did not bring you to Lismore for this."

"Don't be uneasy," I replied, "for I promise you that when I grow very weary, I will give it up, but I have been idle so long, that a little labour will be a beneficial change."

"And if it will be any consolation to you to know it," added Effie with a smile, "papa pays you a higher compliment than he has ever paid anybody before. If he were not an old man—"

"Hush, Effie," said Richard, laying his hand on the speaker's mouth, "you have no right to deprive your father of an amanuensis by frightening Miss Heathcott from the task she has so kindly consented to perform."

I was not frightened, for although I under-



stood Effie's unfinished speech, I thought there was as much chance of the moon coming down to woo, as of Mr. Seymour appearing in the character of a lover.

And the next day my work began.

## CHAPTER VI.

## MR. SEYMOUR'S STUDY.

THERE are many times and circumstances connected with the far off past, round which my memory lingers oftener, and with keener emotions, but few that stand out more distinctly or that I can more readily bring back than the quiet, dreamy days spent in Mr. Seymour's study.

At this moment I have it all vividly before me; the book-littered room, lighted only by a

stained glass window, which, when the sun shone, reflected its brilliant colours on the white paper I was using, and when the sun did not shine, gave a dim, mysterious look to the apartment and all within it; the large pot of mignonette on a little round table by itself, diffusing throughout the room a delicate fragrance, that nearly dissipated the less agreeable one of the musty old volumes that Mr. Seymour delighted in; the dark leather covered desk where he, the master, sat, his head generally supported on one hand, and his face partially concealed while he wrote or read with an absorption that proved his whole soul, for the time being, devoted to his work; and then, at a respectful distance, my own table, that on which his meals were usually placed, its green baize cover strewed with the papers from which I was copying, and those which I had completed, and I myself bending with resolute will over my task, sometimes

roused to an eager interest in what I was writing, when it happened to be thoughts or impressions that I could follow and understand, but quite as often struggling with cruel headache and drowsiness, and thinking that both myself and my silent companion would be found one day turned into stone.

Effie had judged rightly when she said her father would not speak to me except on the subject of my work, and even this did not happen often, as I was a pretty good decipherer of writing, and never ventured to trouble him unless it was absolutely necessary. If, therefore, I learnt to know Mr. Seymour better than he was known by the generality of those around him, it was from those scattered thoughts and imaginings of his earlier days which he placed before me, rather than from any actual intercourse I ever held with him.

The thanks he rendered me at the close of

every day's labour were brief though courteous, and I don't remember that it once occurred to him to notice that I looked pale and tired, though both Effie and Richard were constantly making this discovery.

But I persevered, notwithstanding all discouragements, and I had my reward.

Not, I must acknowledge, such a reward as our old school copy books assure us ever follows the performance of a good action, but simply the reward of looking into the depths of a mind that interested me on account of its singularity, and of which, but for this little self-denial on my part, I should have seen but the surface waters, without ripple or motion of any kind.

I have hitherto spoken of Mr. Seymour only as a man, but as the reader has doubtless not forgotten that he was also a professed minister of Christ, it is time that I said something of his religious sentiments and opinions.

Effie had told me once that her father's views were sound and evangelical, but that she feared his heart had not undergone that renewal which alone constitutes true Christianity. His sermons were unexceptionable, as far as beauty of language, carefulness of style, and strict adherence to Bible teaching could render them, but even I, with my imperfect notions and unsanctified character, had discovered that there was just that something lacking in them which gives success to the preaching of even the most illiterate minister who is taught of God.

Mr. Seymour had discerned all the loveliness of the gospel with his fine, clear intellect, and therefore he stood up boldly as its advocate and champion; but in inviting his admiring listeners to eat the bread and drink the water of life, he knew that he was recommending that which his own lips had never tasted, or cared to taste.

Sad and harsh as it may sound, this was indeed the fact. And he was only one amongst the thousands who are continually proving the truth of the great apostle's words, when he said that "not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called."

Had it been otherwise, I think I should at that time, when my heart was really thirsting for the knowledge that bringeth wisdom, have gladly placed myself under the teaching and guidance of the man whose great mind and varied powers excited my fervent admiration, but I saw that he had the knowledge without the wisdom, and therefore *he* could not be my master, even had he wished it, which I am sure he did not.

One day, impelled I know not by what impulse, I stopped abruptly in the midst of a most elaborate essay I was copying, and said to my startled companion :

"Mr. Seymour, will you think me very im-

## MASTER AND PUPIL.

pertinent and tiresome if I ask you whether you have found in the resources of your intellect and genius a really satisfying happiness, or whether you have not at times a vague glimpse of some untried path wherein you might find a richer, fuller, purer bliss than any you have yet experienced?"

In manifest surprise he answered my unexpected question by another.

"Is there anything you have met with in my writings to lead you to form such a conjecture as this, or do you give expression only to a feeling of your own?"

"I can scarcely tell you, but I believe something I was writing for you yesterday first suggested the thought, and there was such an instant echo to it from my own heart that I could not help giving it utterance."

"I should like to answer you honestly and truthfully if I could, but the subject involves so



very much more than appears on the surface, that I should tire you were I to attempt to do it justice. Can you at all understand me when I say that, without producing positive happiness—nay, sometimes ensuring the very reverse—there is a necessity in what you denominate intellect for seeking its own food and striving to find its own atmosphere, which causes it recklessly to pass by many golden gates beyond which a brighter and purer sun is shining, because *there* it sees not that peculiar aliment it craves, and which too often, like the apple of the Dead Sea, has nothing but bitter ashes at the core.”

“Yes, I can thoroughly understand this,” I replied, with more eagerness than I was accustomed to exhibit; “but does it not almost seem to imply that genius brings with it a curse instead of a blessing?”

There was much of sadness in his voice as he said:

“I believe that it was originally intended to be far otherwise, and there do exist cases where great gifts are synonymous with great virtues and abundant usefulness; but these would seem to be exceptions, while the rule confirms us in the mournful and humiliating truth that however bright and beautiful may be some of the flowers left to adorn our poor, fallen world,

‘The trail of the serpent is over them all.’”

When Mr. Seymour had thus replied to my questions and convinced me that my suspicions concerning him were correct, he returned to the great dull book he was studying, and I never, during the whole time I acted as his amanuensis, had courage to open a conversation with him again.

The one week that Richard had proposed spending at the Vicarage extended into three, before he even talked of going away; and on

the first mention of such a necessity Effie's uncertain spirits sank so perceptibly, that I saw he would have a hard matter to leave her at all. And yet, as he anticipated being called to the Bar in a few months, this loss of time was of considerable importance to him.

Upon the whole, Effie's health had decidedly improved since Mr. Davison had been first called in, and there were moments when even the least sanguine amongst us began to indulge hopes that the fatal disease might yet be arrested, but such seasons being nearly always followed by some more than usually significant token of the continued existence of the treacherous foe, we came rather to fear than to welcome their approach.

The quiet, regular, peaceful life the invalid was at present leading, free from all care or excitement that was not immediately connected with her physical state, could not fail to be beneficial, for it is as true that happiness and

content of mind promote the body's health as that anxiety and sorrow undermine it; but I knew that there must come, at least a suspension to this serene enjoyment, and I was dreading of all things the hour of her parting with Richard.

Like many persons of tender consciences and sensitive minds, Effie, having once fully comprehended that she had wronged the noble heart that had so long been devoted to her, fancied that she could never do enough, or say enough, or love enough, to make up for her error; and therefore it was that Richard's actual presence, and constant assurances that he believed in the depth and sincerity of her attachment, had become absolutely indispensable to her happiness.

But at length Richard, senior, whose lightest word was a law with all his children, wrote to advise his son to return, for at least a time, to London, and the day for the dreaded parting was fixed.

## CHAPTER VII.

## SOMETHING ASTONISHING.

THAT parting! Even at this distance of time I cannot, without sickness and shuddering, recall it, for whenever I do, I have a distinct vision of Effie as she stood in the cold grey of early morning by the window of that dim-looking parlour, her poor little thin hands clasped in Richard's, her face deadly pale, except where traces of tears were visible, and her whole aspect denoting that helpless abandonment to grief which is peculiar

to weak, tender natures like hers, and touches the heart infinitely more than the wildest sorrow of less gentle and dependent beings.

With a painful vividness, too, I see her companion in suffering striving, under the shallow mask of outward calmness, to speak hope and consolation to the poor dying girl, whose agony, though real and pitiable, must certainly have lacked the strength and intensity of his own.

I would not willingly have remained as a witness to this trying scene, but Effie, dreading her physical as well as her moral weakness, had entreated me not to leave her at the last, for fear that she should say or do anything to hinder Richard in the performance of his duty; and his future career was still a matter of interest to this dear, loving child, although she well knew she should not, in the flesh at least, be cognizant of his success or failure.

At length the unsympathising clock, which I had all the time been watching, struck out clearly and coldly the fatal hour that they both recognised as the signal for the last sacred words they might perhaps ever exchange on earth. I gave one hasty glance at Effie, saw Richard encircle her drooping form in his arms, heard the passionate sob that broke from her labouring heart, and to which I almost fancied there came a smothered echo, and then, not being gifted with iron nerves myself, I rushed away and knew nothing more till, ten minutes after, Mrs. Allen knocked loudly at my door, and begged me to come down quickly to poor Miss Effie.

All that weary day we thought the trial had been too much for her, and that she would sink rapidly under it; but nature, though declining, surely was not exhausted yet, and her father's constant presence (for he gave up all for his poor dying child at that time), at length roused

Effie from the first violence of her grief, and by slow degrees its outward manifestations disappeared, or at least were restricted to a quiet melancholy that was not supposed materially to hasten the disease.

Soon after Richard's departure, Catherine came down to stay at Lismore, Mrs. Errol accompanying her, but remaining one night only, and evidently suffering so much from seeing again the symptoms of the same fatal malady which had recently robbed her of a beloved daughter, and was now doing its unerring work on another dear and precious one, that Effie derived little benefit from her visit, and I began to agree with Mr. Seymour that it was a pity to expose the poor girl to the excitement of so many meetings and partings.

The society of Catherine Errol, however, had unquestionably a quieting and soothing influence. Having learnt herself the great lesson "to



suffer and be strong," she was admirably qualified to uphold the weak and trembling, and to give courage to those who were too readily cast down.

During her visit, which lasted nearly a month, we had many seasons of pleasant, social converse—Mr. Seymour being frequently a listener—which took in that glorious future whose shores were becoming daily more and more plainly visible to our darling Effie, and whose peaceful rest she so increasingly loved to hear of; not only, I believe, on her own account, but because she knew that her father and myself were still strangers to the blessed hope, and trusted that our hearts might be won while listening to the praises of the new Jerusalem, where she was going to find an everlasting home.

One evening, after we had all been sitting for more than an hour round her couch, which was

wheeled to the front of a glowing fire, I began to grow oppressed, from the heat of the room, and perhaps a little too from the solemnity of the subjects that Catherine and Effie had been discussing. The moon was shining brightly over the garden, and unheeding the slight frost, I threw on a shawl and went out into the air.

It proved to be colder than I had expected, for we were now only at the end of October, and I had to walk briskly up and down one of the graveled paths, to prevent getting chilled after the relaxing atmosphere of Effie's room. I hoped, too, that the rapid exercise might dispel the unquiet and depressing thoughts which were strangely troubling me to-night, and in which my own dreary future, when all the present should have passed away, occupied a prominent position.

I had not walked long nor met with any suc-

cess in casting off the weight under which I was bending, when the sound of footsteps in the rear caused me to turn round quickly, the slight alarm I had felt changing to unfeigned astonishment when I recognised Mr. Seymour.

"You must be very cold," he said, as I stood still waiting to see if he wanted me or had accidentally taken the path I had chosen for my late promenade.

"It is certainly not warm," I replied, "but the heat in doors was too much for me, and this frosty air is very refreshing."

"Very. Will my society for a few minutes be disagreeable to you?"

"Far from it. My own thoughts are not so pleasant that I shall hesitate in giving them a temporary dismissal. You look ill to-night, Mr. Seymour."

For the moon coming out just then from behind a cloud, showed me his face with a paler

and more troubled expression than I had ever yet seen on it.

"Thank you, I am quite well, but perhaps like yourself a little overcome by the warmth of Effie's fire. Poor girl, she has been unusually animated this evening."

"Yes, Catherine Errol is a better physician than even Mr. Davison at present. I am so glad she is with Effie, for with all my love for her, I could do nothing to calm or gladden her mind in the prospect she has before her."

Mr. Seymour sighed deeply, it was the first time I had ever heard him sigh.

"And what can I do for her? I, her father, and the professed minister of that gospel which is all her consolation and all her joy?"

I was dumb for a few minutes, not only because I knew not what to say, but from pure surprise at this unexpected confidence. At length I stammered out half frightened at my temerity,

"You can at least show her that you lament your inability to go with her to the threshold of the glorious land she is bound for, and this will give her a hope that by and bye you will look out for the golden gate yourself."

It was my companion's turn now to be surprised.

"Miss Heathcott," he said turning full upon me and his features losing for the time that changeless rigid look which so marred their beauty, "You too, I fancy are groping, in the dark it may be, for this golden gate of which you have spoken. I cannot offer to be your guide, for 'as yet I have missed the road myself, but why may we not seek it hand in hand, helping each other by our sympathy and our prayers, and strengthening as we travel on, that link which, whether you recognize it or not, I feel to be already uniting us."

I am sure he must have heard the beating of

my heart when, having finished speaking, he stood in the unbroken stillness of the place and hour, looking anxiously, yes really anxiously, into my startled face.

The words in which he had clothed his strange proposals were certainly calculated to awaken a responsive chord, did any such exist, in the heart he sought to win, and the fierce pulsation of mine as I listened to him might undoubtedly have led me to believe that it had been really sleeping there and was now rejoicing at this summons to awake, but my emotions though strong had too little real pleasure in them to permit of my making a mistake, and I was on the point of answering as best I could, when Mr. Seymour spoke again—

“I see that I have surprised and alarmed you, and for this I am truly sorry. The isolated life I have led has not given me much proficiency in the art of wooing, but you will believe that there

is at least earnestness and fixedness of purpose in whatever I undertake. Miss Heathcott, you are many years younger than myself, you have accomplishments and some personal attractions. You might, even in the narrow sphere you propose entering, work out a higher and a happier destiny than I can offer you, but you cannot undo the link which has bound you to me, and therefore I know—mark me well—I *know* the hour will come when you will say, whatever you may say now, ‘Mr. Seymour I will be your wife.’”

Little indeed had I imagined that my disinterested labours in the study were leading to such a result as this.

In spite of the surprise, mystification, and a feeling that almost approached alarm with which I had heard my companion’s extraordinary address, I could not forbear a passing smile as he concluded with the confident assertion I have re-

corded—but I was careful not to let him see that I could be amused at so serious a thing, and when breath and courage permitted, I replied with a gravity equal to his own—

“You have made the task of answering you, Mr. Seymour, about as difficult as such a task could well be, and before I attempt it even, I must beg you to reply to a question of mine, namely, whether you would have any satisfaction in accepting a hand without a heart, or justify a woman in giving one and withholding the other.”

“Miss Heathcott,” he said, almost sternly, at least I fancied so, “you have not now to deal with a sentimental youth, whose notions of love are confined to moonlight rambles, sickly poetry, and vows of eternal devotion to every pretty woman he may meet. In asking you to be my wife you have a right to assume that I prefer you to all others, and whatever my heart may be, warm or cold, good or bad, that I take you at once and for ever into its innermost shrine;



when you accept me, as you will do in the end, I shall assume the same of you, and without asking a single question expect neither more nor less than this."

Original in all things, Mr. Seymour had certainly abated nothing of his originality in his mode of making an offer.

"Then if I refuse you now," I said, "as I intend doing, with all due thanks for the great compliment you have paid me, am I to understand that you will still persist in the strange notion you have expressed, and that my refusal will count for nothing."

"Pardon, me, Miss Heathcott. It will count for so much that I shall consider that we stand in the same relations as before this conversation took place. You will be troubled with no extra attentions or gallantry from me (he smiled queerly in saying this), but I reserve to myself the liberty of retaining my own conviction as to what the future will bring."

"But you know I am going away from England after Christmas, and it may be years and years before I return."

I tried to speak independently, for my woman's spirit was up in arms at his apparently ridiculous confidence, but in spite of myself my voice faltered at the thought of the long exile before me, and I really wished I *could* love the man who was offering me a home and a position in my own country.

"Well, go, if it pleases you," he said, catching I doubt not, the sudden lowering of my voice, "but you will come back again ere long, and fulfil the destiny prepared for you."

"Really, Mr. Seymour, you must forgive me if I say—"

"Say nothing more to-night," he interrupted authoritatively, "for if you have no love in your heart to warm you, it is time to come in out of the cold."

## CHAPTER VIII.

## FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

IF I slept little that night, I was by no means disposed to allow the next morning Mr. Seymour had anything to do with it. Of course I could not help thinking a good deal, since I happened to lie awake, of our singular interview, and the natural result of all my thoughts was, increasing wonder both as to his proposal itself and his manner of making it. I did not believe for a moment that the man really loved me—the idea

was too preposterous—but he had found me useful, judged me to be quiet and harmless, and dreaded the utter solitude to which he should be reduced when his poor Effie was gone. Truly, under these circumstances I had little to thank him for, and when to all this was added the fact of his strange presumption in assuming the certainty of my eventually accepting him, I felt that I stood rather in the position of an injured party than of one who is weighed down with an unexpected honour.

But even admitting by way of argument, nothing more, than that the Reverend Philip Seymour had suddenly discovered that he had a heart to bestow, and had forthwith bestowed it on me, what great difference in the aspect of affairs would exist? Could I ever be brought to love him in return? Could I pass my life with a man who neither smiled, nor wept, nor enjoyed, nor suffered like his fellow mortals, but seemed

to dwell by anticipation in that mysterious land of snow and ice, which, according to the Swedenborgians, is to be the future abode of those who have greatly sinned in the flesh.

An indignant "no," outspoken in my firm determination, answered these questions, and I rose and dressed myself with unusual energy, longing for an opportunity of commencing towards my would-be suitor that system of chilling reserve which should convince him of the absurdity of his predictions.

This laudable resolution, however, I found more difficult of accomplishment than I should have supposed, for Mr. Seymour, though still constant in his visits to his sick child, whom I scarcely for a moment quitted, took so little notice of me, and appeared indeed so entirely to have forgotten all that had passed between us, that my carefully-prepared conduct was manifestly lost upon him, and there were times when

I was tempted to believe that I had fallen asleep in the garden and dreamt the whole affair.

Apart from this latter idea, I was woman enough (to my shame I record it) to feel piqued occasionally at his utter neglect and indifference. Even on those days when Effie seemed comparatively well, and other subjects besides her illness were freely discussed amongst us, Mr. Seymour would talk much more to Catherine Errol than to me, and had she been an every day young lady, she might reasonably have "thought something," of the evident preference he showed her.

Once, Effie in speaking to me of her father's loneliness after she should have left us, hinted that Catherine would make a nice wife for him, and when she found that I said nothing in reply, for how could I without acting the hypocrite?—asked me plainly if I did not think so?

“ But you know,” I answered at length, evasively, “ that Catherine never intends marrying. If you question her on the subject she will point you to St. Paul’s words where he tells the Corinthian females that a ‘ married woman careth for the things of the world how she may please her husband,’ while ‘ an unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit.’ ”

“ Oh,” said Effie, clasping her shadowy hands, and directing her pure eyes heavenward, “ what a lovely thing it is when a woman really remains single on this account, but dear Catherine is almost an angel.”

I hoped she had forgotten all about her father, and was proportionately vexed when she recurred to the subject.

“ But much as I admire this beautiful and holy principle in Catherine, I could have wished, for poor papa’s sake, that it had been otherwise,

for between ourselves, Dora, I really begin to think he admires her."

"He can scarcely help that," I said, looking stedfastly into the fire, "she is such a sweet creature in every way."

"So she is indeed; but you don't think then, that my hope for poor papa is likely to be realized?"

"It cannot be, if Catherine is sincere in her resolve never to marry."

"No, of course not—but he will be very very lonely."

The tears were in my sweet Effie's eyes, and as I kissed them away, and stroked the little pale hand that day by day seemed to be fashioning for the tomb, I almost felt as if for her sake, I could, were the chance again given me, say, in the words he had chosen for me, "Mr. Seymour, I will be your wife."

As the winter came on, the strength of our



beloved invalid began to decline much more rapidly and perceptibly. Her spirits, too, were less equal after Catherine's departure, and often every effort both of mine and of her father's failed, to rouse her from the long fits of melancholy abstraction which it was so painful to witness, notwithstanding our firm belief that they had more to do with the body than the mind.

Richard was to come down the week before Christmas, and to this time we all looked forward hopefully, none more so I believe than Mr. Seymour, who evidently felt acutely and increasingly his inability to soothe and comfort his poor dying child on the borders of the dark river she was so soon to go over.

I could not help pitying him with all my heart, and regretting that what had passed hindered me from offering him the sympathy and friendship I should otherwise have done. Not that he appeared to want anything from me, or to care

whether I was in the house or not, but simply that my heart had softened when I really believed him to be in distress of mind, and that I would, from woman's natural instinct, have put aside all personal antagonism, and have comforted him if I could.

This, however, as matters stood, was clearly impossible, for the slightest advance on my part would have seemed like an admission that I was coming round, and afforded him a triumph that I could not have endured to contemplate.

It happened one day about this time that dear Effie, fancying she was worse than usual, expressed a wish to have her father alone with her for a little while; but as it was on the morning that he usually devoted to the preparation of his Sunday's sermons, I asked her if she could not wait till the afternoon, dreading, in point of fact, that she would want me to carry the message to him.

“No, Dora,” she replied, with more than her wonted decision, “I feel that I ought not to delay this conversation a single hour, for who can tell what the next may bring. You may not have remarked, as I did, the significance of that passage which occurred in the chapter you read to me this morning, ‘Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might, for there is no work, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, nor device in the grave whither thou goest.’ Let papa come to me.”

“Shall I send Mrs. Allen to fetch him?”

“Oh, please go yourself, dear; he will mind the interruption less, and then perhaps if he has much writing, you can do a bit for him while he is with me.”

To disoblige poor Effie at that time would have been impossible, but the errand pleased me not at all, and I can well believe that it was a cross, unattractive face which suddenly looked in

upon the studious man, and compelled him to bring down his lofty mind to the dull, material earth we were both inhabiting.

His first glance said pretty plainly, "What do you want now?" but before I could speak, the stern expression was replaced by a milder and kinder one, and I delivered my message briefly.

"Do you think she is much worse?" he enquired, with a gathering paleness that distressed me.

"No," I replied quickly, "but I do think that her lightest wishes should be attended to; she has set her heart upon this private interview."

He rose instantly from his chair, and pushed aside all his books and papers.

After a moment's hesitation, I said:

"If I can do any copying for you in the meanwhile, Mr. Seymour, my time and pen are at your service."

"Thank you, there is plenty to do if you are

really disposed to do it. Look, do you think you have sufficient patience and ingenuity to make out these hieroglyphics I have been setting down this morning?"

"I will try. Is it a sermon?"

"Yes, though if that poor child get worse, I may never preach it. You will be cold here I am afraid, Miss Heathcott?"

"I certainly shall if I do not make up the fire. Are you never cold yourself?"

"I never think of it if I am, but I must leave you now; be sure to make yourself comfortable."

"Thank you, I will not fail to do so."

And he went out.

It was, beyond all dispute, a very cold cheerless morning, and everything within and without looked as wretched as it well could. I was at least half-an-hour on my knees by the fire before I could get it to burn, and I said to myself fifty times during this interval, that Mr. Sey-

mour must be the most uncomfortable person in the world to live with. But at length my labours were rewarded by a blaze that brightened the whole room, which I then made as tidy as it would admit of being made, and after that, sat down in a rather better temper to the work the reverend gentleman had left for me.

It seemed to me hours and hours that I was writing there alone; and at last wondering what could be detaining Mr. Seymour, I was on the point of seeking Mrs. Allen and asking her if she knew whether he was still with his daughter, when the study door opened slowly, and Effie's father once more stood before me.

He was much paler than when he had gone out, and his whole aspect denoted, in spite of its present calm, that some very agitating scene or circumstance had stirred up the usually tranquil waters of his soul, and left it void of peace and contentment.

"I hope Effie is not very ill," I said, as he approached the table with his eyes fixed as if by fascination on what I had been writing.

Without replying to my question, or even seeming to have heard it, he quietly laid his hand upon the sermon I had copied so neatly, and compressing his white lips till they looked almost unearthly, tore the manuscript into several pieces.

"Oh, Mr. Seymour," I cried, really believing he had suddenly lost his senses, "what are you doing that for? It has taken me all this time to copy."

He sat down as if very weary and rested his head upon his hand.

"Miss Heathcott, I shall never preach another sermon. It is all over now."

"What is all over? pray tell me!" I exclaimed, beginning to get very excited, and afraid to hear that Effie was actually dead.

"The unholy farce of standing up to call others to repentance before I have repented myself. I have long had misgivings on the subject, but now my mind is settled. Effie has been faithful at last. If we wish to bring conviction to those who are in error," he continued, as if thinking aloud, "it is no use speaking in general terms; we must come to them boldly as Nathan came to David, and say, 'thou art the man.'"

"But surely," I replied, concealing the utter astonishment all this occasioned me, "whatever dear Effie may have urged upon you, she never contemplated your giving up your sacred profession after so many years of active labour in it."

"No, poor child, she only felt it her duty to show me what I lost and what others lost by my being an unconverted preacher of the gospel. She hoped that her loving words on the borders



of the grave would work upon her father's hard heart and give him henceforth a right to the office he has so long unworthily held; but my conscience for once has outstripped hers, and now, if you will be good enough to take up your pen again, I will dictate a letter to Richard Errol, begging him to find me a curate till I can make arrangements for resigning the living altogether."

In my heart I thoroughly approved of the step Mr. Seymour proposed taking; it commended itself to my reason and to my judgment. I knew it must be a right thing, and yet my pity for his resolutely concealed sufferings was so intense that had I possessed any power of dissuading him from it, in a way to silence his wounded conscience, I should certainly at that time have used it unhesitatingly.

As it was, my only part seemed to be obedience to his request; and, admiring the firmness of

his voice and the stedfast look of his eye as he dictated clearly to me, I wrote the letter, and then believing he would wish to be alone, rose to go, only lingering a moment to add a little more fuel to the fire I had taken such pains with.

In passing his seat again he held out his hand to me.

“ Miss Heathcott, I have shown you more of my heart than I am accustomed to show to any of my fellow-beings;” then, with a strange smile: “ you will remember this by and bye, when you are striving to forget the lonely man who sought one flower to cheer him in the wilderness; but go to Effie now. I have no more work for you.”

✱

## CHAPTER IX.

## THE TYRANT COMING NEARER.

THE interview which had produced so striking an effect upon Mr. Seymour, had done no good in a physical point of view to poor Effie, whose timid, gentle mind had worked itself into a perfect fever of excitement in resolving to obey the imperious dictates of conscience, by telling her father plainly that he was a minister unsent and uncalled of God. She had, indeed, fondly hoped that late events, and especially the pure

and elevated conversation of Catherine Errol, had not been without benefit to him, and her tender heart, yearning more fondly than ever towards her only parent as the time of their separation drew nigh, she had trusted that this last effort in his favour (an effort that none who did not know Effie intimately could have appreciated) would be accepted as the means of his entire enlightenment.

But Mr. Seymour's long established habits of reserve and distance with his own family, hindered him from confessing the full effect her solemn and impressive words had produced on him, and although she knew that he had decided on having a curate, she had but a very faint idea of the fierce struggle going on in his soul, nor how truly he could have said with Felix, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian."

The increasing severity of the weather soon compelled our beloved invalid to take entirely to

her own room, and often, indeed, forbade her even sitting up during the whole day. Mr. Seymour gave her as much of his time as possible, but he was necessarily very busy in finding a suitable home for his curate, and then in initiating the young man (who was in every respect qualified for his office) in the various parochial duties attached to it. Having once got through all this, and had the satisfaction of seeing that the parish had lost nothing by the exchange, for Mr. Seymour had certainly less of personal vanity than any man I ever knew, his mind seemed in some degree to recover its former serenity, and he even began to enliven rather than to sadden the dull room, where, for me at least, the long hours went by so wearily.

For my own mind at this time was in a very unsettled and dejected state. I felt bitterly and acutely the want of that faith and hope which would have taught me to resign my darling

without murmuring at the personal bereavement, and the constant expectation of death—death that I must witness, to be followed by a cold blank that I believed nothing earthly would ever fill up, was trying in the extreme. I knew that I was growing nervous and irritable, and that my usually robust health was far from what it had been when I first came to Lismore.

One day when I had been reading for nearly two hours to Effie, not conscious of much fatigue at the time, because the poor dear had appeared so happy and peaceful in listening to the words of life, Mr. Seymour suddenly came into the room, and after a few kind words to his daughter, turned with a frown upon his brow to me.

“Miss Heathcott, I am sorry to pay you so bad a compliment, but you are really beginning to look quite old and ugly from confinement to this one room. The air is clear and frosty this

morning, so go at once and get your bonnet on, and tell Mrs. Allen to take you for a long walk."

"Yes, do go, dear," said Effie, laying her hand caressingly on mine, 'it makes me miserable to see you looking so pale, not ugly though, as papa knows very well in spite of his rudeness, but really a good brisk walk will be of the greatest benefit to you."

I thought at the moment of all the pleasant walks we had taken together, and my nerves being weak I could not help crying, though I would have given much to have had the power of controlling myself.

"Oh pray don't, Dora," pleaded Effie in an instantly troubled voice, "or I shall think I am selfish in having you with me at all. Look, dear" (in a whisper) "you are making papa quite uncomfortable."

And in truth the cold stern man had walked

to the window, and I was in doubt as to whether he was angry or affected at my weakness.

Anyhow it was better to go, and just giving Effie a kiss on her pale forehead, and whispering that to-morrow or the next day she would have Richard to take my place, I was hurrying from the room without again looking towards Mr. Seymour, when he turned abruptly and intercepted me at the door.

"Promise me that you will cease crying, and that you will take Mrs. Allen with you."

"If you wish it," I replied hurriedly, only anxious just then to get out of the room.

"Thank you," he said, and I fancied there was a little quiet triumph in his voice, which had I been less pre-occupied with saddening thoughts would certainly have made me indignant.

Good Mrs. Allen with her own invariably red eyes, was assuredly not a companion calculated to enliven me, and after requesting her to take



me to some place where I had never been with Effie I decided on avoiding conversation altogether.

As reasonably might I have decided on stilling the fierce wintry blast that ever and anon swept by us as we pursued our cheerless, melancholy walk, through a succession of dull ugly lanes, that I had certainly not seen before, and most cordially hoped I should never see again.

Mrs. Allen, like most of her class and age, found relief from the bitterest sorrows in talking freely about them, and I was compelled to hear all she thought on the subject of Effie's illness, on her own anticipated misery should it end fatally, and on the increasing strangeness of "poor master" who, she assured me, had not a bad heart at the bottom, though he did seem sometimes as if he had no more feeling than a log of wood or a block of granite.

In the midst of searching I verily believe for

new similes to express what "master" seemed, but was not, my garrulous attendant suddenly exclaimed:

"And you, miss, I hope to goodness if that dear lamb should die, that you will not think of running away from the Vicarage. We have got used to you now like, and it would be just too much to lose both."

"But my dear Mrs. Allen, only consider for a moment, how could I possibly remain the guest of an unmarried gentleman even were my time at my own disposal, which it is not, as I am going to France to be an English governess soon after Christmas."

"Well, miss, I am very sorry to hear it, and hope with all my heart it will be prevented yet. I've always heard that France is a dreadful place both for papists and frogs, which they say the natives eat; and as for it not being proper for you to remain here, why I've not lived to my

time of life without knowing a little about propriety, but as you are well aware, miss, there are ways and means that it's not for me to talk of to you, only I've been too many years in the family not to be able to guess pretty nearly as to people's wishes and inclinations."

Had I not been possessed of a clue, I should undoubtedly have lost myself amidst the mazes of this rather singular speech, but as I had no intention of letting my companion know that I understood her, I said immediately, (apropos of nothing:)

"If Mr. Richard writes to tell us he will be here to-morrow evening, we must try to get Miss Effie up for a little while, that he may not be so much shocked at the change in her looks."

"Ah, poor young man! he is to be pitied, if anybody ever was, and having lost a sister, too, so lately; but as I was observing, Miss (and I

hope no offence), it will be a double blow to poor master if you leave us for good."

I did not want to be talked to about poor master. I had scanty faith in his capacities for grieving long or deeply over any heart disappointment; but even were it otherwise, what was it to me? My mind was quite made up to go to France on Effie's death, and not all the Mr. Seymours in the world—it is true I always said there could be but one—should hinder me from the accomplishment of this purpose.

"My good Mrs. Allen," I replied rather stiffly to her last observation, "I think you make a slight mistake concerning your master's sources of happiness or contentment; but be that as it may, I have pledged myself to fill the situation of which I spoke to you just now. Mr. Richard was kind enough to procure it for me, and if I live I shall certainly go."

"Well, miss, I have no doubt you are right,

and I beg your pardon for having been so bold as to speak my mind; but you see you have got to be so natural here, and have always seemed so like a sister to that dear lamb who is dying, that it is hard, as I said before, to think of losing you both at once."

The old woman, at this point of her lamentations, began to sob aloud, and I really knew not how to comfort her, being quite as much in need of comfort myself.

"Let us go home," I said quickly, "these hollow gusts of wind freeze me to the bone, and nobody could be benefited by a walk like this."

When we were close to the door, my companion said beseechingly:

"Please, miss, don't let master know I've been crying instead of cheering you up;" then half to herself: "some people expect other people to have no hearts, but we shall just see how master himself will bear it by and bye."

We had not returned a minute too soon, for immediately after our departure Effie had become alarmingly worse, the man servant had been dispatched for the doctor, the little housemaid was running about the house looking frightened and bewildered, and Mr. Seymour was holding his apparently sinking child in his arms, and endeavouring to give her the support and consolation he appeared quite as much in need of himself.

His emphatic "I am so thankful to see you back," as I entered the room, seemed to me the most natural and hearty words I had ever heard him utter, and instantly taking his place by my poor, fainting, darling, I told him in a low voice that he need not attempt to force me away from her again.

It was some time before the doctor could be got at, but when at length he came and administered the proper restoratives, the dangerous

symptoms gradually subsided, and as he said nothing to discourage our hope, we trusted that our precious one was yet to be left with us a little longer.

In the evening came a letter, bidding us expect Richard in the afternoon of the following day.

## CHAPTER X.

## THE TYRANT BREAKING THROUGH THE DOOR.

MR. SEYMOUR had an appointment with his curate at eight o'clock that evening, and he was detained in the village till past ten. Effie, wearied out by incessant fits of coughing, had been for some little time asleep, and leaving Mrs. Allen with her, I went down to receive the father, and tell him how his child had been during his absence.

The fire had gone out in his study, but there was a good one in the parlour, and I asked him



to come in for a minute, as the wind blew so fiercely and keenly through the hall.

"It is a wild, wintry night," he said, sitting down in the easy chair which had been poor Effie's as long as she could remain below—"terrible weather for sick people, and trying even for those who are in health."

"You look as if you had a headache."

"I have a very bad one, worse than I ever remember to have had before—but how does she seem now?"

"Very much exhausted, but I daresay the sleep will revive her. Anyhow I intend sitting up to watch to night."

"Nonsense—why should you kill yourself unnecessarily? Let Mrs. Allen sit up and then she could call both you and me if any change took place."

"Mr. Seymour, you had your will with me to day—Now it is *my* turn, and I repeat simply,

that nothing should tempt me to go to bed to-night."

"Then you think there is immediate danger?"

"I cannot say, because my judgment would go for nothing in a case like this—but I will acknowledge frankly that there was something that struck me as peculiar in Effie's face when Richard's letter was read to her. She repeated the words—'to-morrow afternoon,' in a strange voice, as if unconscious that she was speaking aloud; and I firmly believe that her own impression at least is, that she will see him no more on earth."

"Poor child, poor child; but, thank God, she is happy and ready to go?"

He put his hand to his head, and appeared to be suffering almost too much for distinct thought of any kind.

"Mr. Seymour, if you can wait a little, I will make you a cup of strong tea; the kettle will boil in a few minutes on this clear fire."

“Thank you, that would be very good of you, for indeed I am in severe pain.”

The tea was soon made, and I was glad to find that it seemed to refresh him greatly. He insisted on my drinking some also, and again urged me to go to bed for at least part of the night.

“For you know,” he said, speaking in his calmest voice, and as if he expressed nothing but the most natural sentiment, “you will soon be all that is left to me in the world.”

“Surely,” I thought to myself, in reflecting afterwards upon these words, which I had no presence of mind to answer at the time, “surely if this is not a vain man—and I never believed him vain—he must be a mad man, for on what other grounds can I account for his constant and persevering assumption that I am to be his wife, notwithstanding my decided rejection of his offer, and the pains I have always taken to convince him that he has not even a corner in my heart.”

When he wished me good night, I was struck by the exceeding heaviness of his eyes, and the dry, burning heat of the hand he extended to me.

"I think *you* will want the doctor," I said, afraid, though, that my voice should express too much kindness and anxiety; "it is not improbable that he will look in again to-night."

"If he does, beg him from me to remain with Effie. For myself, I hope to be asleep in less than an hour, and well enough to-morrow to see that *you* commit no imprudences."

The doctor did not come, and finding Effie still sleeping, I took a book, and firmly resisting Mrs. Allen's entreaties to be allowed to stay also, prepared for the long, solitary watch I intended keeping.

First I made up a bright, cheerful-looking fire, beside which a little kettle was singing, in case Effie might want some tea; then I arranged

the warm window curtains so that not a breath of the cold, biting air could penetrate through them, though its peculiarly mournful wail no ingenuity could shut out. After this I brought my easy chair to the fire side, trimmed the night lamp, satisfied myself once more that Effie was sleeping quietly, and at length sat down to read.

Whether I did read, or whether I slept, or whether I remained simply in that half dreaming, half-stupid state which often follows great excitement or fatigue, I really cannot say, as my only distinct recollection, dating from the time I sat down, is of hearing my name pronounced by a voice that I certainly for the moment believed to be supernatural. It was so strange, so faint, so unearthly, and yet rang out with such silvery clearness in the profound stillness of the hushed room.

When the first startled feeling had passed

away, and the nervous beating of my heart in some degree subsided, I got up and went on tip-toe to the bed. Then I knew at once that it had been Effie's voice, and kneeling down that I might be closer to her, I took her cold hands in mine, and asked her if I should get her anything.

"Nothing, dear," she said, and this time the voice was even fainter than before, "but tell Richard that I had no regrets, that all, *all* was clear and bright at last. Tell him that he must not mourn for me unreasonably, that we shall meet again in the fair, celestial city which I am to see first—I, who have been so faithless, so unworthy. Oh, Dora, my kind, unchanging friend, if grace is given you to become a Christian, strive to *adorn* the doctrine of Jesus, strive to live and walk in the Spirit at all times, so that when you come to cross the swelling Jordan, Satan may not have to taunt you with your lukewarmness, and suggest doubts of your inte-

rest in that precious blood, which cleanseth from all sin—all sin that we truly loathe and repent of, as I hope I do of mine. Don't cry now, Dora, but rather rejoice with me that the fight is over, and the victory won—won, not indeed by me, but by Him—*that blessed One*, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

It was only utter exhaustion that made her cease speaking, for I saw that her heart and soul were full, and I listened breathlessly to every word as if they had been the utterances of an angel who had come from heaven instead of those of a saved sinner hastening there.

But when she was silent, and I heard her gasping breath, and felt the increasing clamminess of her icy hands, a shuddering dread stole over me, and I whispered hoarsely:

“Effie, dearest, let me call your father.”

“No, no,” she murmured softly, “unless you are afraid, do not disturb him. He will suffer

soon enough, and perhaps I may yet see another sunrise. Dora, promise me that you will try to comfort them both—papa and Richard.”

“ Ah, my child, my darling, my first and only friend! and who will comfort *me*?”

It was selfish and inconsiderate, but I could not help it at the moment, as I looked upon her with all that, for me, was bright, and gladdening, and beautiful on earth was associated, fading from my sight and from my grasp, like a dream of joy that we know will never come to us a second time.

She pressed my hands with all the little strength she had left, and said, with infinite tenderness in her voice and eyes:

“ Dora, you must seek a better friend, a surer comforter than I could ever have been to you. Remember the lines you once showed me:

‘Lean not on earth, ’twill pierce thee to the heart,  
A broken reed at best, and oft a spear—”



"Don't go on, Effie, don't; my heart is breaking at the thought of losing you, and you are wasting all your scanty strength in a vain attempt to reconcile me to my fate. Sleep again, my child, and perhaps in the morning you will be better."

She shook her head with a faint, sweet smile, but allowed me to arrange her pillows, and to put her into the most comfortable sleeping posture.

"And now, Dora love, go back to the fire, for you are very cold, and I am making you colder."

"And you will try to sleep?"

"I will try, and so must you. One kiss, and now God bless you, dear, for ever!"

The words rang in my ears long after I had returned to my corner by the now dying fire; they mingled dismally with the sound of the pouring winter rain, which now began to beat

against the windows with a pitiless fury; they did not leave me for a minute even when my excited thoughts went back to the bright summer time when Effie, like a sweet, shining star had first risen on the cheerless isolation of my life, and taught me that earth has even greater charms than rocks, and lakes, and leafy trees. And as I traced, with streaming eyes and aching heart, the progress of our friendship, the happy days we had spent together, till I arrived at that eventful one, when, her peace and gladness all gone, she had yet clung to me for consolation, and in the deep silence of the lonely woods half confessed her poor heart's treachery and weakness, still these words, "God bless you, dear!" rose above all my reminiscences, and appeared to my disordered imagination like a seal set upon some cherished record of happy hours gone by, whose history was thus declared finished for ever.

Fearing by the slightest movement to disturb Effie, if perchance she slept, and believing she would soon call me to her again if she did not, I remained so perfectly quiet and motionless in my chair, that ere long I fell asleep myself in reality.

The rain continuing to rattle against the window panes no doubt assisted, together with my previous meditation, in suggesting the troubled dream that then visited me.

First it was simply a faithful repetition of the pic-nic excursion on Mrs. Errol's birthday—nothing changed from what the reality had been till the occurrence of the thunder storm, when, after its whole violence had passed over us, and I had laid my poor Effie down on the wet ground; I stooped to gaze more closely into her pale face and discovered to my horror and despair that she was dead.

With a violent start, if not a cry of alarm, I

awoke, and found both lamp and fire gone out, the rain had ceased, and a grey, misty dawn struggling through the carefully closed curtains.

My heart beat wildly as I hastily got up and walked to the bed. Effie was exactly in the position in which I had left her, but I must undraw the curtains before I could clearly distinguish her features, and a feeling I was unwilling to analyze prevented me from touching the little hand that was hanging outside the white counterpane.

I let in the light; I stood for a minute gazing out upon the dismal morning; I thought we should have but a misty, cheerless sunrise even if Effie lived to see it—but when with a sudden spasmodic effort I turned to look again upon the bed and its occupant, I knew at once that she was enjoying the full, perfect, glorious, and eternal sunshine of the celestial city.

For she whom we loved was dead!

## CHAPTER XI.

## WAVE UPON WAVE.

I HAD talked a great deal, and thought still more than I had talked, of the loss I should sustain when Effie died, but never till the moment when my fascinated eyes rested upon the shattered earthly tabernacle of the pure spirit which had been knit to my own, did I realize at all what it would be to part with her.

It is only when we see death that we get a

distinct view of that mysterious and solemn barrier which is erected between those who have passed for ever from our material world, and those who are still dwellers in it. When once the body is committed to the dust, and time has begun its healing work upon our bruised hearts, it may be that memory will love to linger round the lost one, and even imagine some spiritual communion existing in the place of that familiar earthly intercourse which is broken for ever; but before anything like this can be accomplished, we must forget altogether the impressions produced by the first sight of death's cruel signet on the beloved face, for while these impressions remain, the sense of separation must be as complete as it is terrifying and heart sickening.

I only ventured on one shuddering look, and then, turning away, I tore open the door and ran as fast as my shaking knees would permit me, to Mrs. Allen's room. The old woman was

just beginning to dress herself; and, knowing her great attachment to Effie, I ought to have been more cautious; but thinking of nothing but the one overpowering sorrow, I clung round her neck, and with sobs and cries that might have been heard in any part of the house, told her that our darling was dead.

Poor faithful, loving soul! Her natural and obstinate incredulity served her instead of the preparation I had neglected to give her. She knew I must be mistaken—people in declines never went off “so sudden like;” it was only a heavy sleep, or at the worst a fainting fit, that we should get her out of presently. Nevertheless, she only stayed to throw on a loose gown, and then followed me, looking very pale, into the fatal room.

I allowed her to approach the bed alone. I had no desire yet for a second interview with death, whose ghastly visage was imprinted only

too faithfully upon my excited imagination ; but I watched my companion narrowly, as, less horror stricken than I had been, she stooped down close to the corpse, and passed her hand several times over the rigid features.

“Blessed, blessed angel!” she said at length, in a low, broken voice.

And then I knew that she had been fain to accept my testimony as truth, and that there was in that death chamber another bleeding heart besides my own.

For several minutes not a sound broke the unearthly stillness of the room. Mrs. Allen had assumed a kneeling posture by the bed, and I daresay was praying, in her simple fashion, to be made submissive under the blow she could not but feel acutely, while I stood by the window watching the heavy, scudding clouds, and wishing I were as inanimate and insensible to suffering as they.



I was surprised that there had been no violent outburst of grief on the part of the old housekeeper. She, who had cried so much from the first, seemed to have no tears to shed now; but when she rose from her knees and faced me, I could not doubt that the arrow had struck deeply, and I admitted and respected the strength of mind which enabled her to put aside all outward demonstration of sorrow, now that the time for personal exertion had arrived.

I believe people in a comparatively humble sphere of life almost invariably shame their superiors in cases such as these, and I can only account for it on the ground of their habitual subservience, and the necessity which they constantly recognise, to forget themselves when those whom circumstances have made their masters, have to be thought of and attended to.

Mrs. Allen must have known perfectly well that,

for the present at least, hers must be the head to think, and hers the hands to do, whatever was thought of or done in the vicarage, in reference to the sad event which had stamped it with a gloom and desolation that no summer sunshine would henceforth have power to dissipate. I am sure she was thinking of her own heavy responsibility when she said, on joining me at the window :

“ I suppose it is certain that Mr. Richard will arrive to-day.”

Unlikely as it may appear to those who know nothing of the confusion of brain, which follows strong and painful excitement, I had not remembered Richard till this moment. But my sympathies were ready to start forth in their mourning robes on the first summons they received; and in reply to Mrs. Allen's question I said only :

“ Oh, what shall we do ! who will tell him ?”

She seemed now for the first time to be struck with the symptoms of agitation and suffering displayed in my countenance, and pushing a chair towards me, she entreated me to sit down, and try to calm myself a bit, before "master" was called.

"As for Mr. Richard," continued the old woman, every now and then while she was speaking, directing a quick, stolen glance towards the bed, "may be he'll hear the news—for bad news travels fast—before he gets to the Vicarage, but if not I'll see him first. And now, shall you mind, miss, staying here while I go to poor master?"

I did mind it very much, not from any superstitious fear of being alone with the holy dead, but because I fancied it would involve the necessity of my seeing Mr. Seymour in his first anguish, and I felt just then as if my own was quite enough to bear. However, I had no

choice but to assent to Mrs. Allen's proposal, and she hurried off on her painful errand, leaving me still in the chair by the window, from whence I could see now the dripping trees and sodden turf of the Vicarage garden, growing more and more distinct in the increasing light.

The lonely watch I had kept during the night seemed short and pleasant compared with the time I sat waiting for Mrs. Allen's return, and listening in nervous torture to the slow ticking of a little clock that stood on the mantelpiece.

By this clock she was absent nearly half an hour, and to me it had appeared more than twice that length of time, but at last, and just when I had remembered Mr. Seymour's violent headache of the preceding evening, and was wondering whether he could be ill, my ear caught the sound of advancing feet, and I rose eagerly to welcome now whoever it might be.

It turned out to be only Mrs. Allen, and her face showed me at once that some new and unlooked for trouble was on the point of being communicated.

"I'm sorry to have left you here so long all by yourself, miss, but when I got to master's room, I found him in no state to listen to what I had to tell him. He's caught the fever that's been in the village for the last fortnight—that's sure enough, and I've had to send off for the doctor, and do no end of things besides. Misfortunes always come in company, as I've proved time after time: and now, miss, this being the case, I mean poor master having an infectious fever, I won't ask you to stay a single hour in the house. Sally can help you pack your clothes, and take you down to the station in time for the twelve o'clock train."

"My good Mrs. Allen," I said firmly, for my strength and courage seemed to expand with

the necessity for their exercise, "I am not in the least afraid of catching the fever, and nothing short of being turned out forcibly, shall compel me to leave the house at present. Do not therefore, let us waste time in arguing about this, but tell me more of your poor master. Is he quite insensible?"

"Quite—and so far it's a blessing; and it's a blessing too, seeing that he was to have this fever, that our precious child has been taken out of the sorrow it would have given her. Thank the Lord, she's safe now in His arms for ever! Pretty lamb! how quiet and peaceful she looks, while we who are left have got no end of strife and trouble before us. I must have you go and lie down, if you won't pack up, Miss Heathcott."

"I should much prefer being made useful if that were possible, Mrs. Allen."

"But it isn't possible, while you've a white,

scared looking face like that. Go to bed for a couple of hours, and by that time the doctor will have been and given his orders, and Sally and I shall have put things a bit straight here, and then I'll see what I can let you do for me."

There was a respectful authority in the old housekeeper's manner which, coupled with a sensation of increasing weakness, disposed me to yield to her desire—and assuring her I wanted no assistance, but would obey her instructions to the letter, I crept to my own room, and throwing myself without undressing on the bed, was soon wrapt in a profound and dreamless sleep, and utterly unconscious during many hours, of all that was keeping the other members of the household in a state of anxiety and incessant activity.

## CHAPTER XII.

## THE TIDINGS TOLD.

WHEN I awoke, feverish and unrefreshed, some straggling beams of a sickly winter sunshine had found their way into my room, and the little housemaid was standing near my bed with a cup of tea in her hand.

“Lawk, miss, ain’t I glad that you’ve opened your eyes at last; you looked for all the world like a corpse, and if Mrs. Allen hadn’t been so busy, I should have called her to see if you wasn’t



dead. Take a good drink of this strong tea; it's cold enough now, I warrant."

I swallowed the reviving beverage eagerly, and then asked how Mr. Seymour was.

"Just about bad, I can tell you," was the country girl's reply, in a voice that betrayed her participation in the weakness peculiar to narrow minds, of loving to impart news of an alarming description; "the doctor says he's got the fever terrible, and he can't tell but what he'll die of it, poor gentleman! Who'd have thought it, to see him yesterday? and Miss Effie lying dead in the house. We're to have a reg'lar nurse from the village, and —— but good gracious, miss, you be a going off quite white again. I'd better call Mrs. Allen."

"No, no, Sally, I shall be well presently, only you must not talk so much. What o'clock is it now?"

"Nearly three. There's a good fire in the

parlour, if you can get down, miss, or should you like one lighted here?"

I could not of course think of giving any additional trouble at such a time, so I said I would go down to the parlour, as I was shivering with cold, and that when Mrs. Allen was disengaged for a moment I should be glad to speak with her.

This did not happen till after four o'clock, and in the interval I sat alone in that dreary parlour, incapable of doing anything but cower over the fire, and picture to myself the scene when poor Richard should arrive.

I was very sorry for Mr. Seymour, and fully determined, if they would let me, to assist in nursing him (for Effie's sake perhaps even more than for his own) but as there could be only physical suffering for him at present, I certainly felt more sympathy for Richard, and accorded him the largest share in my distressed and troubled thoughts.

Sally brought me in some dinner soon after I had gone down stairs, with a message from Mrs. Allen that she hoped I would not refuse to eat a bit; and I did eat, because I felt that my strength would otherwise have given way, and I wanted to be a help and not a hindrance in the already burdened household.

At length Mrs. Allen came to me herself, and said that the nurse having arrived, she could now "sit down quiet" for a minute or two. The dear old lady was looking painfully careworn, and wholly unfit for all the arduous duties that were devolving on her; but her zeal and courage seemed to rise in proportion as her bodily strength faltered, and she assured me that she had no fears of not getting through her task, and only hoped that I should bear up as well.

It appeared that for once Sally had not exaggerated the doctor's report of Mr. Seymour. The fever was of the most virulent kind, and

nothing but his known strength of constitution gave a hope of his recovery. Even under these circumstances it was a doubtful case, and would require the utmost attention, the most untiring watchfulness on the part of those who were appointed to nurse him.

"Well," I said, "we must do our best, Mrs. Allen, and leave the issue in the hands of Omnipotence."

The housekeeper opened her eyes very wide.

"You don't surely mean, miss, that you would help to nurse if we were disposed to let you do such a thing."

"Indeed I do—but why not?"

"Why, the fever's infectious, and (though I wish it wasn't so) Mr. Seymour is nothing to you."

"That may be, Mrs. Allen," I replied, meeting her glance without a blush, "but Miss Effie was my dearest friend, as you know: she

loved me like a sister, and believe me I would do far more than this to prove how truly I loved her in return."

For the first time that day I saw tears come into the old woman's eyes as she seized my hand and shook it heartily.

"God bless you! miss, for your kind heartedness and devotion, but we must see what Mr. Richard will say."

The mention of Richard's name drove all thoughts not immediately connected with him out of my head again, and I asked Mrs. Allen how soon he could be at the Vicarage.

"If he comes by the early afternoon train, he may be here in a few minutes," she replied, stirring the fire, and beginning from long habit to put the room tidy; "but don't be running away, miss," for I had risen from my chair; "on the first sound of the bell I will go out and receive him."

What a coward I felt beside this brave, warm hearted old woman, and the only excuse I could make to myself was that she did not know the depth of Richard's love as I did. I might have added that during her sixty years' experience she had grown more used to the sight of human suffering.

The short time she was able to stay with me was not without its use. It lifted the crushing weight of utter desolation from my heart, and made the room appear less chill and unearthly even after she had gone. But continual gazing into the changing forms of the brightly glowing coals became at length insupportable to me, and then I summoned courage and walked to the window, that low, old-fashioned window, with its painted seat, where I had last seen Effie and Richard standing hand in hand together.

It was a miserable and most depressing remembrance, and I tried to get rid of it by fixing

my attention on some of the objects in the garden outside. Alas! there was nothing cheering or hope-inspiring here; nothing but naked trees, sheltering coldly, little heaps of brown wet leaves that the wind had deposited round their trunks; damp gravel paths, showing every foot-mark that had passed over them, and a dull, slate-coloured sky above all, giving notice that darkness was coming on apace, and that happy families would soon be gathering lovingly round the winter's hearth.

From this scene I turned away with feelings that none could have envied, and had just determined to draw down the blinds, and shut it out altogether, when the gate bell rung sharply, and set my heart beating so nervously that I had to grasp my chair for support.

I listened for a moment, and then heard Mrs. Allen's active feet hurrying through the hall. In the front of the house the shutters had been

closed since morning, and this, I now remembered, would probably in some degree prepare Richard for what he had to hear. Still, still the blow would be dreadful and overwhelming, for had it not been so to me, who had watched the gradual decay from hour to hour; while he had not seen the poor girl since she had taken to her room, and was anticipating at least some few weeks of precious intercourse ere he parted from her for ever!

I opened the parlour door very softly, and heard the outside gate unlocked. Then there seemed to me a pause, but I supposed Mrs. Allen was speaking very low as befitted the solemn tidings she had to impart. After this there seemed to be a mingling of several voices, and afraid of being detected, I retired to the far end of the parlour, closing the door, and thinking that after all it could not be Richard who had arrived.



My suspense was not doomed to be of long continuance, for scarcely had the sound of firm footsteps in the hall convinced me that some man or men had entered with the housekeeper, when the latter threw open my door, and, saying in a distinct voice, "you will find Miss Heathcott alone, sir," gave admittance to Richard Errol, senior.

It was now very nearly dark, but as I could see his face and note its trouble and agitation, I suppose he could see and make the same discoveries regarding mine.

At any rate there was more than fatherly kindness in his voice and manner, as he came and shook hands with me, and uttered a few low words of greeting suited to the occasion.

"Where is Richard?" I said, really feeling that nobody else had any right to be thought of at such a time.

"He is come, but they have taken him up to

see her at once; he wished it, poor fellow! it will do him no harm."

"How did he bear the first intelligence? It must have been so wholly unexpected."

"It was; we heard it at the station on our arrival, but he bore it as a christian man should, depending on his God alone for strength. Richard's sorrow will never burden any heart save his own."

I thought to myself that this was all he knew, but in the sense the father intended, doubtless he was right.

"It is a good thing," I observed next, "that you happened to accompany him. We had no idea of seeing any of the family except Richard."

"No; it was a sudden determination of mine. Mrs. Errol could not come, and we both thought the poor girl, who was nearly our child, might be pleased with the attention. I was only to

have remained one night, but the aspect of affairs being so altered, I must try to get an extension of leave. This is sad news about Mr. Seymour."

"It is indeed."

"We must get *you* away to-morrow any how. You will not be afraid to travel to London alone."

"Certainly not; but I have no intention of undertaking the journey at present. I shall remain to assist in nursing Effie's father."

"That would be a clear act of insanity, since the fever is infectious, and there are plenty of regular nurses to be found who will take better care of him than you can do."

"I don't know about that, but I have told Mrs. Allen I shall not be turned out; and I hope you will not compel me to appear obstinate in my determination by opposing it."

"If I were your lawful guardian, I should

forbid it. As it is, I can of course only advise you as a friend."

He spoke so very kindly and gently that it brought the tears to my eyes, and I begged him not to think me ungrateful for all he and his family had done for me, if I still persisted in what I believed to be a point of duty to the dead as well as to the living.

"My dear," he said then, "it is enough. I, at least, shall oppose you no more. After the funeral, Richard can return to town, and I shall endeavour to stay here with you; but now I had better go and have a look into the sick room, and perhaps you will order up some candles."

I did this immediately, and by drawing the curtains, mending the fire, and bringing the couch and some easy chairs close to it, made the room look as bright and cheerful as I could, but I had no inclination to preside at the meal which Sally told me was in course of preparation for

the father and son. I felt that however sad they might be, I should undoubtedly render them sadder, and that for their sakes as well as my own, it would be highly desirable to remove my tear-stained, weary, haggard-looking face to another apartment.

At present I knew I should be worse than useless as a nurse, and despairing of obtaining an interview with poor Mrs. Allen, who was evidently in danger of being worked to death, I made haste to my own room, and sending an excuse to the gentlemen down-stairs, laid my aching head upon the cold pillow, and after some hours of restless tossings to and fro, and listening to the movements of the unquiet household, lost the consciousness of all my sorrows in a calm and blessed sleep.

## CHAPTER XIII.

## UNSUCCESSFUL ARGUMENTS.

MY night's rest had so far restored my physical strength, that I no longer felt wholly incapable of battling with my own individual grief, or of assisting to lighten the cares of others.

It was late, however, before I got down stairs, and then I found that Mr. Errol had breakfasted and taken his station for awhile in the sick room, while Richard, who had spent the greater part of the night there, was now drinking his coffee in the parlour alone.

"I have been anxiously expecting you," he said, as, without venturing to speak myself, or even to look into his face, I went up and shook hands with him, "you have heard I suppose that Mr. Seymour is a shade better this morning?"

"No, I have heard nothing as yet; the servants are so busy, but I am very glad."

"Yes, it is a little encouragement, at any rate. And now sit down, and let me give you some breakfast. You are not looking as you were when I saw you last."

If he could be so strong and brave, surely it would be a disgrace to me to shed a tear. And yet the very fact of knowing that beneath that calm surface lay, all crushed and bleeding, the hopes of a life time, made self-possession on my part a work of no little difficulty. When the nerves have been weakened by a long season of trial, it is so hard to keep them on all occasions

under due control, and even if we accomplish the task, nature will have her revenge in some other way, and teach us how limited is the strength in which we boast ourselves.

I drank in silence the cup of tea that Richard poured out and handed to me. I had eaten yesterday, but I could not eat now, and yet until I left my room, I had felt so wonderfully better in every respect. I thought that if my companion would only speak freely of the great sorrow which had fallen upon us both, I could reply to him with composure, and the painful sense of restraint at present existing would be done away. But I concluded afterwards that he had preserved his outward calm only at the price of a total avoidance of the subject, and I honoured him the more for being able to dispense with that human sympathy which weaker minds are apt to seek before all else.

When I had finished my tea and rejected, one



by one, the various eatables he so kindly persisted in offering me, I moved my chair to the fire, and asked him (for the sake of saying something) when he should return to London.

"Not yet, he answered, suddenly bringing his own chair beside mine, "but I wish very much, indeed, that I could prevail on you to leave Lismore to-day."

"Oh, your father has been telling you to talk to me about it," I said, feeling really vexed at having the same ground to go over again, "but I warned him that I could be very obstinate, and I am sorry to find you, too, enlisted against me."

"My father, on the contrary, has been won over to your side. The responsibility of opposing you rests now entirely with me, and me alone."

"Then I hope you will be ready to give it up when I assure you that I am altogether deter-

mined about this matter, and that I am puzzled to account for the numerous objections I meet."

"Do you think then that your health and life are as valueless to others as they appear to be to yourself."

I felt the checked tears creeping slowly from my eyes at these unexpected words, but I shaded them as if only from the glare of the fire, and said:

"No, but there is no reason why either health or life should be endangered."

"That is *your* opinion, but it counts for little against the experience of older and wiser heads. Will you take my earnest advice and go?"

"Please don't ask me."

"I must fulfil my duty at all risks. You know that however precious your ministrings to the sick man might be, he is not at present in a condition to appreciate them. A hired nurse, under his own old servant's superintendence, will

do all that can be done for him till the height of the fever is past. My father and myself will be here while there is the shadow of danger, and what more shall I say? Just this, that I am persuaded I am giving expression to what Mr. Seymour's own wishes and feelings on the subject would be, were he conscious of what is going on. For *his* sake, then, let me urge you to leave him to us, and return to London (where my mother will be delighted to receive you) this afternoon."

Perhaps he thought that it was only the ruddy glow from the blazing fire that imparted such a vivid colour to my cheeks while he had been speaking these last words, but I at least was better informed as to its cause, and never in my life did I feel so uncertain as to the answer it would be best and wisest, and least productive of personal embarrassment, to make. At length, with slow and hesitating utterance, I said:

"I believe you are arguing upon some erroneous premises. It does not matter, only you have been so very, very kind to me that I should not wish you to think I was deceiving you in any way. Will you give me credit for speaking the simple truth, when I assure you that in the event of Mr. Seymour recovering from this illness, I shall bid him farewell without the most remote idea or intention of ever seeing him again."

As I did not even in concluding this candid piece of information venture to raise my eyes to Richard's face, I cannot tell whether it expressed surprise, regret, or any other emotion. His voice was simply earnest and kind as he said:

"I appreciate your confidence though, believe me, I had no thought of seeking it. But why then, may I enquire, will you persist in remaining in the midst of danger at the Vicarage?"

This time I hesitated longer than before, and

spoke at last rather in reply to the glance of affectionate brotherly interest that I for a moment encountered, than to the verbal question which had preceded it.

“Because in the first place, I loved Effie so dearly that all whom she loved *must* be objects of interest to me; and in the second place” (how I wished his eyes were anywhere but on my face) “because I think if Mr. Seymour should become worse, he would like to have me with him, and this little service is all I shall ever have an opportunity of doing for him.”

He took my hand and shook it so heartily as I ceased speaking, that I could not believe he saw the matter in a different light, and approved my intention of staying at Lismore.

Great was my disappointment therefore when he said again—

“Much as I may admire your womanly tenderness, I must still protest against the impru-

dence into which it is leading you. I am tiring you I can see with my perseverance, but you must forgive me, if not for my own, for her sake whose death has left us both desolate."

"Both desolate!" What was there in these words to bow my heart so low, and to make it tremble like a startled bird in the presence of him who uttered them.

How was it too, that I felt immediately afterwards that if Richard would only assume authority, a brother's authority, and say "you *shall* leave Lismore," I should without another word have obeyed him, glad and happy to have met a will to direct and control the uncertain and often erroneous impulses of my own.

But Richard could not read my soul, and if he had possessed that power, it still remains doubtful whether he would have changed his weapons to suit the unaccountable caprices of a woman in whom he was only indirectly interested.

Recovering from my foolish tremor, I said he was not in the least tiring me, but that I felt on the contrary deeply grateful for the trouble he had been taking.

"And taking it seems in vain," he replied, with a half smile, that oddly enough, showed more distinctly the ravages one night's suffering had made in his appearance than all his previous gravity had done.

"You must not let my obstinacy vex you. I will never act in opposition to your advice again."

I don't know why I said this, except that my heart being so full of a sympathy I dared not utter, I wanted like a child to make amends for it, as well as for my apparent wilfulness, in some way.

Whether Richard admired the way, or even heard what I had said, I had no means of ascertaining, for after waiting in vain for an

answer I looked up stealthily into his face, and saw in it an expression that convinced me some mysterious, and I fancied then, supernatural influence had drawn his thoughts into a brighter and purer atmosphere, whither I might not follow.

It was but for a little while, and then he spoke again gently and kindly, but the current had been wholly changed and if we had remained together, our conversation would have been no more of things human, but of things divine.

The doctor's visit sent down Mr. Errol to have a turn in the garden with his son, and I, declining an invitation to join them, went to look for Mrs. Allen in the housekeeper's room.



## CHAPTER XVI.

## POOR RICHARD.

NOT finding my old friend, I sat down to await her coming, and to think over the interview I had just had with Richard. That he had heard or guessed something of Mr. Seymour's professed attachment to me there could be no doubt, and that my determination to stay and nurse the sick man, had led to the belief that the sentiment was mutual, appeared equally evident; but I was puzzled beyond measure as to how the

knowledge had been gained, for I had never suspected Mr. Seymour of hinting it even to Effie, and still less could I suppose that he had made a confidant of Richard Errol. For a moment the idea crossed my mind that Mrs. Allen had been chattering, but I dismissed this thought indignantly when I remembered how few opportunities she could have had since last night of speaking to Richard, and how full her heart was of a grief that must, for the time, banish from it all subjects of a minor interest.

It was altogether a mystery, and likely to remain one, as most assuredly I should never allude to the matter again, and after what I had told him, it was equally improbable that Richard would do so.

I should certainly have felt a satisfaction in knowing what he had thought about it prior to our conversation; whether his sound judgment had been enlisted in favour of the presumed at-

tachment or otherwise, but having no means at my command for obtaining this information, I was obliged to be content with my ignorance, and at the same time try to believe that, after all, it was of no consequence in the world.

It was not long that the subject occupied my thoughts on the present occasion, for these soon went back to Effie in her white shroud upstairs, and to her poor father who would perhaps die ere he knew of his loss, and to the mourning household, and to my own desolate future, over which I could see shining no sun, nor moon, nor star, to cheer its loneliness.

When Mrs. Allen came in, my eyes must have been red and swollen, for she said I should cry myself into a fever, and that I ought to take example by Mr. Richard.

"Give me something to do then, dear Mrs. Allen, and working will drive away the tears."

"Is it settled for you to stay?"

“Yes, quite; you are not sorry I hope.”

“For my own sake I am glad enough, for to speak truth I begin to feel my age amidst all this trouble and excitement, and if you could just take my place as housekeeper while these gentlemen are here, I could get a little rest sometimes, and it would be doing me a real kindness.”

“Only give me a lesson in my new duties, and you shall see how zealously I will perform them; but if any extra watching or attendance is required up-stairs, I must be permitted to be useful there as well.”

“So you shall, my dear, depend upon it. Mr. Davison says master is going on pretty well, but that the crisis won’t come for three or four days more.”

“I suppose not. Does he seem to suffer much.”

“He’s quite delirious, poor gentleman, and

so I hope there's less sense of pain, but it's about as bad a fever as ever I saw, and I've seen a good many."

The greater part of that morning was devoted to my initiation in the duties required of me, which I found involved a larger amount of actual exertion than I had any idea of—but I was really delighted to be able to relieve poor Mrs. Allen, who wanted rest above everything, and whom I persuaded to lie down, on her own comfortable little sofa by the fire, while I ordered the dinner, and gave out the things that were required for the day's consumption.

I did not see either Richard or his father again till dinner time, when I took the head of the table, and went through my part without much shrinking, for they were both so exceedingly kind and attentive to me, and appeared to think so much more of my sorrow than their own, that I should have been cold and ungrate-

ful indeed had I not endeavoured by every means in my power to repay their goodness.

In the evening they sat together and wrote letters, and not wishing to intrude upon them, I had a fire lighted in my own room, and carrying with me a parcel of Effie's favourite books, tried hard to make companions of these, and to forget for a while that in the great, noisy, bustling world, I was once more emphatically *alone*.

Until the funeral, every day passed pretty much in the same dreary, monotonous manner. Mr. Seymour's condition did not alter materially, though, as the crisis approached, it was feared his strength diminished too rapidly to favour a hope of his getting through the illness. Mr. Errol and his son were untiring and devoted in their care and attention to him, and as I was still kept out of the sick room, I did all I could to help in other ways, and they were good

enough to commend my efforts and to declare they could not have managed without me.

Busy as I was, and little as I saw of Richard, less even than of his father, who often persuaded me, when it was fine and dry, to walk with him for half an hour in the garden during the morning, I could not help remarking with secret pain that the former was growing thinner every day, and that the sorrow he so carefully locked in his own heart was telling fearfully upon his outward appearance. I spoke of this once to the elder Richard, who only replied with unusual gravity:

“ We can do nothing for him, my dear, except at the throne of Grace; but this has been a wound that it will take years to heal.”

I had expressed a wish, as Mrs. Allen was going, to be present at the funeral, and though they had thought it was courting unnecessary excitement, no serious opposition had been made

—but when the morning arrived, I rose with such an overpowering headache that I was obliged to give up my project, and to remain a prisoner in my room till the evening.

It was a terrible day for us all, and I was not surprised to hear from Mrs. Allen that poor Richard's long-sustained courage had forsaken him on the lowering of the coffin into the grave, and that heedless of all the curious lookers-on, he had bowed his head and wept aloud.

I denied myself the gratification of going down to him when he came home, and telling him that I entered into every feeling, and was weeping even more for his desolation than my own.

I judged (and I believed rightly) that this knowledge would have given him no comfort then, and that all the sympathy he needed was ever ready to be offered by the father who understood and appreciated his son as few fathers



(however fondly they may love) understand and appreciate their grown up children.

So we met but for a few minutes during the whole of that sad day, and then it was only when I went down to pour out their tea in the evening, and when I found them both as unequal to any sort of conversation as I felt myself.

They took it in turns that night to watch with the nurse and Mrs. Allen beside the sick man's bed, for the fever was now supposed to have reached its height, and Mr. Davison thought he should be able by the morning to speak decidedly as to his patient's chance of recovery.

Before I attempted to sleep myself, I had ascertained from Mrs. Allen that everything was going on favourably, and she promised to come and let me know the moment any change either for the better or worse took place in her poor master.

About five o'clock in the morning I was

roused by her gentle tapping at my door, and jumping up to open it, nervously enough you may be sure, I saw at once by her face, all weary as it looked, that it was good news she had to tell.

"God be praised for all his mercies!" she said with grateful emotion as I drew her into the room, "the danger's over, and master is sleeping now as calm and peaceful as an infant."

"I am very glad."

"Mr. Richard hurried me off to tell you, because he thought you might be awake and anxious. Poor dear gentleman! he looks bad enough himself anyhow, I only hope he won't have caught this dreadful fever."

"Oh, Mrs. Allen—"

I felt sick at heart, and could not say another word.

"La, miss, I had no idea of frightening you in this way," (for I suppose I was pale) "it was only a silly remark I made—and I did not know

'—that is, I did not think how weak and nervous you had grown."

"True, dear Mrs. Allen, I *am* grown weak and nervous, but never mind me now. Let us rejoice that Mr. Seymour is better. Has the doctor seen him yet?"

"To be sure, or how should we have known anything about it. Get into bed again, my dear, and try to sleep, for you don't seem quite yourself this morning."

"Is Mr. Richard still with your master?"

"Yes, but he's going to lie down when I return. Now do get some rest yourself, for when master's senses come back, as they will after this sleep, he'll be certain to want to see you."

Instead of obeying my kind adviser, I lighted a candle, dressed quickly, packed up all my clothes and when the morning had sufficiently advanced to permit me to discern external objects, crept down quietly to take a last solitary walk round the Vicarage garden.

## CHAPTER XV.

## POOR ME.

I WAS very unhappy, and the biting cold, which, under ordinary circumstances, would have frozen my very blood, and soon driven me into a less exposed atmosphere, scarcely affected me now at all. It had been snowing hard in the night, and everything around me was looking white and glistening in the faint morning sun that had just made its appearance in the still misty sky.

As I walked rapidly along some of the most sheltered paths, where the snow had only partially covered the ground, a holly tree, with its shining crimson berries, reminded me that to-morrow would be Christmas-day, the last, perhaps, that for many a long year I should spend in my own country, and although my former life, until I knew the Errols, had given me little experience of positive happiness, still it had been free from cares or regrets of any kind, destitute of all strong emotions, and flowing on as tranquilly and uneventfully as one of the quiet streams of my own beautiful valleys in the north.

But since then, within the last five months, I had tasted real enjoyment; I had made acquaintance with life's sunny side; I had known what it was to have the heart filled and satisfied, and the mind charmed and enlightened by communion with kindred though superior minds. And all this I had appreciated in a tenfold

degree from having been during so many years deprived of it, and accustomed to look upon myself as a person totally unqualified for any of the rare pleasures of social existence.

But alas! to what purpose had I thus awakened to the warmth and brightness that earth has still in her power to bestow? To what purpose had I thus felt and seen and enjoyed, since after so brief an interval all was to be taken from me? A momentary flash of morn before a long, long, dreary twilight.

Better, far better would it have been to have remained in my torpid state, than, having been roused effectually from it, to find myself consigned during the coming years to a loveless, cheerless, solitary existence.

True, there was one alternative offered to me, which would at least have given me an intelligent companion, a kind protector, and a home, and what more ought I to have required?

Oh! grasping, unfathomable, pining human heart, when dost thou ever say, "it is enough?"

I plucked one of the bright holly sprigs, and examining it closely, and thinking of the interesting legend attached to it, wished I had found the golden gate that led to Calvary, and that my unquiet heart could rest itself under the shadow of that wondrous cross. This, indeed, would be a remedy for all; this would bring something infinitely better than the negative contentment of former days, for it would bring, in addition to the peace that passeth understanding, a power to stem life's torrent, however rough it might be, and to reach in safety that glorious habitation, where alone I could hope to meet those who had first taught me to catch the fleeting sunbeams that Heaven showers down upon earth.

I scarcely knew how it was that with such a clear consciousness of the advantages of religion, there existed in my heart so little inclination to

make it the first and chief object of pursuit. After a fashion, I might certainly have been said to be a seeker, but there was as yet none of that energy or wrestling in prayer, which at a later period I ascertained to be requisite for the attainment of the best of blessings. I seemed to be waiting for something with which religion had nothing to do, and which nevertheless had become a craving of the unsanctified nature too strong to be set aside.

It is true I could not very accurately have determined the object of this craving, or decided whether it was one or many. Perchance it had reference to those numberless large excitements of life which the coming years might bring even to me in my humble sphere, or it might be pointing to one little star in the vast universe of human blessings, and crying to destiny, "Pluck me down that star or I die" At any rate the yearning and the restlessness were there, and



they had certainly appeared in much stronger relief since Effie's death. It was time, indeed, that I sought amidst new scenes and people a frame of mind more in accordance with the dull, prosaic duties with which, in all probability, my whole life would be filled.

I had imagined that in consequence of the long night watching, the greater part of the household would be stirring late this morning, and I had forgotten that the room Richard occupied looked out upon the garden. The thought of what Mrs. Allen had said about the possibility of his having the fever had just occurred, though not for the first time, to my mind, when turning suddenly in my walk, I perceived him advancing quickly towards me.

"I fancied you did not like the cold," he said, when near enough to be heard, and shivering himself as he spoke; "how is it then that you have been walking here for the last half hour?"

"It is a farewell walk," I replied, as he fell into my step and seemed disposed to listen to what I had to say. "I leave the Vicarage this afternoon."

"Why; and where are you going?"

I thought he might have expressed more surprise, even if he could not express more regret, and I answered rather shortly :

"Mr. Seymour being out of danger, I have no longer a motive for remaining; and I intend begging a night or two's lodging in Bloomsbury Square."

"What is the matter, Miss Heathcott?"

He was really surprised now, and endeavoured to look into my face, which I knew would reveal nothing more formidable or interesting than a sudden fit of bad temper.

"Nothing is the matter, thank you, only I must make up for lost time. You know I agreed to be in France the week after Christmas,

and I have got many necessary preparations to get through before I can finally leave England."

"*Finally* leave England. Do you never then intend to return to us?"

"How can I tell what will become of me? As for intentions, I have none either way. I am in the enviable position of the leaf driven 'hither and thither by the wind.'"

"But why persist in leaving us at all? Have we not convinced you that our home is yours—doubly yours now, from the loss we have sustained and the associations that will ever connect you with our poor Effie."

"You are very, very kind—all of you—kinder than I deserve you should be, but I must go; it will be better for me."

"And yet you will go, I fear, with a heavy heart, and without many cheering anticipations for the future."

“That cannot be helped ; but don’t let us talk about this now. How is Mr. Seymour?”

Wonderfully better, and quite sensible again. My father has told him of his bereavement, and he seems even in his delirium to have had a consciousness of it. He knows also that you are here, and hopes in the course of the morning to see you.”

“But he must be very weak still.”

“He is, and this great physical prostration hinders him from feeling his child’s death as he will do by and bye. Poor man ! he is greatly to be pitied.”

I thought Richard had a peculiar talent for feeling pity and commiseration for everybody except himself.

Presently he said :

“You will see him before you go, will you not?”

“Certainly, if it will give him any satisfac-

tion. How long do you and Mr. Errol stay here?"

"Till after to-morrow at least, and it is possible that I may remain for another week."

"Then I must bid you good-bye when I leave Lismore, for it is certain I shall have started for France long before you get back to London."

"I hope not; however, in the event of such being the case, I would take this opportunity of asking a favour of you. For Effie's sake, who was so dear to us both, may I write to you sometimes?"

"*May* you! Can you not imagine that it would be an equal pleasure to me?"

"I don't know; but if it is, you must indulge me by occasionally answering my letters."

"I will always answer them."

"Even if they chance to be on dull or serious subjects?"

"Even then."

"Thank you; and now don't you think we had better go in and give my father some breakfast?"

"Yes; but—"

"But what?" (For I hesitated and stammered as if I had something very formidable to bring out.)

"Only Mrs. Allen told me this morning you were looking so ill, and we know the fever was infectious; you don't feel as if you had taken it, do you?"

He could not help smiling a little at my ridiculously blundering query; (a vainer man might have been unduly flattered by it) but he only said in his quiet manner:

"I don't think there is the least fear of such a thing."

And then we went in to breakfast.

## CHAPTER XVI.

## MY PARTING INTERVIEW WITH MR. SEYMOUR.

I HAD been having a long conversation on the subject of my own future prospects with the elder Richard (who, though he was surprised at my sudden determination to leave Lismore, quite approved of it), when a message came from Mr. Seymour, requesting to see me as soon as I was disengaged.

For a multitude of reasons I had an especial dread of this interview, and it was, therefore,

with anything but a bright or a cheerful countenance that I presented myself at the door of the sick room, and knocked tremblingly for admittance.

Mrs. Allen answered my summons, and whispering, "you must try to cheer him a bit," drew me in.

I suppose he had previously given orders that on my entrance everybody else should go out; for scarcely had I crossed the threshold, when the nurse, who had been making something over the fire, and Mrs. Allen, whose work was thrown hastily down, and Richard, who had been sitting near the bed, all vanished, and left me standing alone—gazing at the poor man, the desolate father, to whom I had come to say farewell for ever.

He was changed, of course, and looked older by many years, but there was a softness in his countenance quite foreign to the usual expression ;



which, whether the result of illness, or of any other mental suffering, certainly imparted to his face an attraction it had hitherto wanted.

"I don't know how to thank you," he said, (and then I perceived at once how weak he was) "for all your kindness in staying here at the risk you knew you were incurring. You are a brave good girl—come nearer, and if you are not afraid, let me at least shake hands with you."

I went up to the bed, and shook hands with him, saying something, in a confused nervous way, about my satisfaction at finding him better.

"Yes, I am sure you are glad," he continued, forcing me to take the seat Richard had vacated —"and although one of the very few links that bound me to earth, has been broken, I am glad too, for I would, if possible, redeem the time that is past, and make the latter years atone in some degree for the former."

“You will not give up your living, now?”

“Perhaps not—but I cannot tell you yet. This illness may have weakened my faculties. I am sure it has changed me in many ways, though there is one strong feeling that it has left untouched. Have you any curiosity to hear what it is?”

I knew the red was mounting to my cheek and brow, and heartily wishing myself a thousand miles away, I said, as indifferently as I could.

“No, I am not much troubled with the feminine weakness of curiosity, and I think, Mr. Seymour, you are talking too much to be good for you.”

“Perhaps I am, but I will take the risk—unless indeed you promise me not to go away to-day.”

“I cannot do that. I must have some time in London, and I ought to be in France by the end of the month, at latest.”

"Then you have quite made up your mind to be a governess."

"Certainly. I always told you so."

"And you will not stay, even for her sake who is now an angel in heaven, to comfort her poor desolate father?"

"Oh, Mr. Seymour, this is really cruel of you—you have no right to appeal to my love for Effie—has not her death left *me* desolate too?"

The tears were coming now fast and thick, and I felt angry as well as sorry.

"Forgive me, then," he said, once more taking my hand, "and do not torture me by crying. I must not repay the noble generosity you have shown by urging you to act against the dictates of your heart, but when the heart *does* begin to plead for me, then you will come back and be the sunlight of the old man's home."

My hand was in his, and though I wanted it

away, I did not like in this last interview to appear too cold-hearted and unkind, for putting all else aside, he was my lost darling's father, and his illness had added strikingly to the likeness between them.

"But if the heart should not begin to plead for you, Mr. Seymour," I said with a half smile, which he caught instantly.

"It will, it will. I am sure of it, as sure as of my own existence; how otherwise, in my bereavement and sickness, could I endure to part from you now?"

In spite of myself I *was* touched at the thought thus suggested of his coming loneliness, and there might have been an unconscious softening of my voice as I replied:

"You must keep Richard with you as long as possible, and go sometimes to see them all in London."

"No," he said firmly, tightening for a moment

his hold of my reluctant hand; "I shall live on hope, and when this ceases to be sufficient nourishment, I shall know that you are on your way to me, and everything shall be in readiness to receive you."

It was clearly no manner of use to argue with him or to attempt to displace the fixed idea which had taken possession of his mind. Perhaps it was a good thing after all, and would keep him from dwelling exclusively on Effie's death. That time and absence would dissipate it I could not doubt, and even if otherwise, the sea would be rolling between us, and the mere fact of his believing that I should one day be his wife, could not act as a mesmeric influence to draw me to his side.

My great object now was to shorten the interview, for I saw it was exhausting him, and I wanted to have a few more words with Richard before I left the Vicarage.

"Well," I said, in answer to his last observation, "as it is quite evident that you attach no importance to my most earnest and serious assertions, it is worse than useless continuing to utter them, and the time is getting on. We *must* say good bye in the end, however long we may delay it. I assure you I am not leaving you without much pain and regret, for as a friend, and as my poor darling's father, I have the sincerest regard and esteem for you."

"And as Dora Heathcott simply, I have the truest and most exclusive love for you. Do you believe this?"

"I suppose I must, but it is quite incomprehensible to me. And now, Mr. Seymour, good bye, and may every blessing attend you for time and for eternity."

I had risen as I spoke with the full intention of being very calm and self-possessed, but the mere utterance of those two words, "good bye"

brought such a flood of bitter thoughts into my mind that the weakened nerves gave way in an instant, and before I had time to notice that *his* eyes were overflowing, I had sunk into my chair again, and was crying with hysterical passion.

The poor sick man was generous and noble hearted then. He would not take advantage of the emotion which had made me for the time a very baby in his hands, but putting the lover quite aside, he soothed me as a tender father or pitying friend might have done, and on the cessation of my tears told me I had better go ere we both became more agitated.

In my gratitude for all this, I let him kiss the hand he had been holding, and the last "God bless you" fell as warmly and fervently from my lips as from his.

## CHAPTER XVII.

## PARTING WITH RICHARD.

I HAD not been very long in my own room, when Mrs. Allen presented herself, looking so excessively unhappy, that I feared for the moment she was the bearer of more evil tidings.

“I beg your pardon for disturbing you, miss,” she said, taking, however, the chair I immediately offered, “but master desired me to give you a message, and, oh, dear, if I may make so bold, how sorry I am to hear that you are really



going after all. I did hope that at the last, when you saw poor master so set upon it, and so weak and low, which is not to be wondered at, but quite the reverse, you would have stayed with us for good. I can't help saying it, miss, and I hope you won't be angry. I should have had such a pride and pleasure in getting everything nice and new for you, for I'm sure master would have spared no expense, and—"

"My good Mrs. Allen," I interrupted beseechingly, "pray, pray don't go on in this way; my nerves have been sufficiently tried already, and you know I have a great deal before me. What is Mr. Seymour's message?"

The old housekeeper wiped her eyes, setting me down, I am afraid, as the most heartless of womankind, and answered my question rather stiffly.

"Master forgot, he says, to tell you that he

wishes you to take whatever books or other things you like belonging to poor Miss Effie."

Here the voice relaxed, and a fresh torrent of tears almost choked her.

"He would have given you the little dog, only Mr. Richard begged for it, therefore you're to have what you please of her other property, except her Bible, poor dear lamb, which master will keep himself, and the hymn book she was so fond of, which he has given to me."

"Mr. Seymour is very kind," I said, determined that nothing should make me cry again to-day, "and you may tell him that I have already taken the few books Miss Effie wished me to have, and that I have also a little ring which she put on my finger herself the day before her death. I cannot accept anything else, and these will be more than sufficient to keep her in my memory."

"And are we never to hear from you, miss,

when once you are gone to that outlandish country?"

"If you would like to hear from me, Mrs. Allen, I shall have much pleasure in writing to you sometimes."

"Thanking you humbly, miss, there's nothing (except that which it seems can't be) that I should like so well. And now I will go and see about your dinner, and I suppose you would like a fly ordered to take you to the station."

"If my box could be sent, I should much prefer walking, as I daresay Mr. Richard or his father would accompany me."

"To be sure they will, though I can't but think Mr. Richard will be sorry things have turned out as they have."

"Mrs. Allen," I said, with a sudden firmness, that must have looked very like ill temper, "you will oblige me by alluding no more to a subject that has become painful to me."

And she left me alone.

Richard came in while I was eating my early dinner, and receiving a ready permission, sat down to have a last talk with me in that little parlour, which was associated with so many memories for us both.

I cannot tell whether Mrs. Allen's judgment was correct as to his regretting my refusal to become the mistress of Lismore Vicarage, for he made no allusion whatever to the subject, and spoke of Mr. Seymour's unwillingness to part with me as the natural result of my great friendship for his daughter, which had made me appear to be almost a part of Effie, and must give me at least an unfading interest in the hearts of all those by whom she had been beloved.

Had Richard been looking at me when he said this, he would have seen *that* in my face which it might have puzzled him to account for, but fortunately for my self respect he was at the

moment stroking poor Effie's ugly little dog, to keep it from teasing me for bits of meat while I was eating.

I had soon finished my own dinner, and then cutting up a plateful for Pet, I called him to come to me, glad of having something to do, as the time rapidly approached for bidding a final adieu to the Vicarage.

Releasing his unwilling prisoner, Richard said :

" You must not think me selfish in having asked for this little animal, Miss Heathcott," (how I wished he would learn to call me Dora). " for had you been going to remain in England I should have given you the choice of taking it. Even as it is, whenever you return, if you like to claim it, it is yours."

" Thank you," I replied, bending very low over the plate I was holding; " but I have already plenty of memorials of her we have

lost, and no one can have so much right to Pet as yourself."

"Effie has left me something which I shall value infinitely more."

"Indeed! what is it?"

"Her private journal. In the last letter she wrote to me she mentioned her wish that this record of her most sacred feelings should be mine when she had left me for ever in the present world. You were to give it to me."

"It is I believe locked in her desk, the key of which I only a few minutes ago sent up to her father. Will you go and ask for it?"

He went at once, and was absent several minutes, during which I was wondering at Effie's bequest, and thinking it almost a pity that he who had loved so fondly and truly should have a written evidence that the time had been when the heart he clung to had wandered from its allegiance. He might already be acquainted with the fact, but a thing of this kind coming

from the trembling lips of the beloved one, whose repentant tears would plead for indulgence and forgiveness, must surely produce on the mind an effect far different to that which would naturally result from reading a plainly written avowal of the same lamented treachery.

It was done, however, and no doubt with a most pure and virtuous intention, and I could only hope that the remembrance of the perfect love and confidence of their later intercourse would suffice to keep from poor Richard all regretful or bitter thoughts.

In giving me the key, he said :

“Mr. Seymour appears greatly distressed this afternoon, and the nurse tells me he is alarmingly weak. I am really sorry that having stayed so long you should now be hurrying your departure.”

He did not know all my reasons for what I was doing, nor did I intend that he should.

I went to fetch the journal, but I could not

give it into his hands without a reluctance which he discovered.

Looking at me rather earnestly for a few seconds, he said:

"I shall like to read these pages, believe me, though I am not unprepared for the wormwood that will mingle with the honey. My poor Effie had an idea that bitters were more likely to cure heart sickness than sweets, but I would not read a single line if I thought there was a possibility of its making her memory less dear and precious to me, or of altering by a hair's breadth the position she has ever held in my heart."

"It will not do this," I said eagerly; "my darling was never really undeserving of your esteem, and well would it be for us all if we were as watchful over ourselves and as fearful of having even the garments spotted by the flesh as she was."

This evidently pleased as well as touched him,



and after carefully locking the journal in his own desk, and glancing at the clock on the mantelpiece, he told me that I should only just have time to make my adieux to his father and Mrs. Allen, before it would be necessary to start.

The elder Richard did not suffer me to go without many kind expressions of a hope that I should remain as long as possible in Bloomsbury Square, and return to it unhesitatingly whenever I wanted a home.—and as for Mrs. Allen she could only squeeze my hand and press her apron to her eyes, and sob out “God bless you,” in tones that went to my heart.

I was in fact so thoroughly upset with these final leavetakings, that the walk I had looked forward to with Richard, had to be performed in nearly total silence on my part, lest my courage should quite give way, as it had done in the morning, and incapacitate me for my solitary journey.

On arriving at the station we found we had a very few minutes to spare, but in spite of the excessive and increasing cold, I preferred walking up and down the platform, to going into the warm waiting room where we should not have been alone.

Often and often when the blue skies of the sunny south were smiling down upon me, and nature keeping its gayest jubilee in that soft and genial climate, did I recall my last walk with Richard on the Lismore station platform, with the cold wind whistling around us, and the bleak, snow-covered landscape stretching dismally beyond.

And at such times I felt that I would gladly have exchanged all the external brightness that was so prodigally showered upon me, for one of the kind words or looks which made those last few moments precious, and caused me to forget both the chill wintry atmosphere, and

everything else of a depressing nature, while I was under the immediate influence of those words and glances.

"You will write to me first," said Richard, as having chosen a comfortable seat for me, he stood at the carriage door till the final signal for starting should be given, "or at any rate to some of us, that we may be assured of your safe arrival."

"Yes," I replied, and it was all my voice was capable of.

"I wish," he continued, "that you could manage to stay in London till I return. I am not half prepared to say good bye yet. Won't you make an effort to put off your journey?"

The simple affirmative would not do this time, so I was obliged to get as far as:

"I am afraid I cannot."

"How pale you are," he said abruptly, "I very much question the wisdom of your journey

to-day. Confess now that you do not feel equal to it."

I tried hard to smile, but nature refused to be mocked in this fashion, and a swelling in the throat warned me that in a few more seconds all my long sustained courage would be at an end.

I could only stretch out my hand to him and shake my head in reply to his question; and then to my great relief the last bell rang its noisy summons to the lingering passengers, carriage doors were slammed unceremoniously; I was locked in with two quiet looking ladies, and Richard had only time to press my hand affectionately, and to say something in a low voice, which I was too agitated to hear distinctly, but which I took to be an assurance that I should not be forgotten.

And oh, the desolation that I felt as the train moved slowly off the platform, and in its progress hid him entirely from my view!

## CHAPTER XVIII.

## PREPARATIONS FOR FLIGHT.

NOTHING could exceed the warmth and kindness of the welcome that awaited me in Bloomsbury Square, and if the most considerate attentions, mingled with loving words from each member of the family, could have lifted the weight from my heart, I should not long have groaned under it. But everything here reminded me of Effie, and the contrast of my present arrival with the former one, only six months ago, presented

itself so vividly to my mind, that during all that first evening I could answer none of their questions without tears, and it was not surprising that they should say they had never seen a person so much altered in a few weeks as I was.

The next day I was calm enough to discover that others besides myself were altered. Mrs. Errol and her two eldest girls, though active and busy as usual, had lost (it might be only for a time), the cheerful animation that had formerly made them so charming, and given such a peculiar brightness to the home circle. This second death, occurring so soon after the first, had evidently affected them very deeply, perhaps more even in reference to its probable influence on Richard's destiny (for he was so beloved in his family), than on their own account.

But the most striking and serious change I observed was in Isabel. She, who had been like

a constant sunbeam in the house, had subsided into a quiet, melancholy, unsociable, and occasionally irritable girl. Nothing pleased, nothing interested her, and I could not doubt, even before I spoke to Catherine about it, that this was one of the trials that the mothers and sisters were so pathetically lamenting, and which had chased much of the gladness I missed from their affectionate hearts.

"It is too true," said Catherine, in reply to a question of mine, as to whether these symptoms in her youngest sister had not appeared long before Effie's illness gave them all an excuse for depression. "Poor Isabel has never been the same since Arthur Vincent ceased to come here. Mamma is wretched about her, and has tried every means of gaining her confidence, but the moment the subject is even remotely touched upon, Bella changes colour so rapidly and remarkably, that we are afraid this pining has

brought on some heart disease that it would be dangerous to increase by any kind of agitation."

"Have you not consulted a doctor?"

"No, because it would be useless doing so without telling him the truth, and I am sure the poor girl would die of the shame of having her weakness commented upon."

"What a pity that young man should ever have become so intimate here. I suppose you have heard nothing of him since he left England?"

"Yes; he has written to Richard twice, I believe, the last time from Rome where they were going to spend the winter. And mamma sent him a paper the other day with an account of our poor Effie's death."

I made no remark on this to Catherine, but I thought that for once dear Mrs. Errol had done a very foolish thing, though of course she knew not wherein its folly consisted.

I only allowed myself one day to rest—and



that was Christmas day, and a very cheerless festival for all of us—before commencing my preparations for leaving England; and as I had really a good deal to do, the constant occupation helped me to get through the dull cold sunless days without being conscious of any increase of that depression which I supposed then would be habitual to me.

Mr. Errol returned home three days after my arrival, bringing the intelligence that Mr. Seymour progressed very slowly, and that he had made Richard promise to remain at the Vicarage till the beginning of the new year.

There was no special message to me from either of them, and though I had no reason to expect such a thing, I was grievously disappointed, which must have arisen, I suppose, from the weakened state of my mind, and its blind grasping at every straw that seemed to hold out a hope of comfort.

I had written to France to say that I should be there on the first or second of January, and in spite of all the earnest solicitations I daily received to defer my departure, at least till Richard came back, on this point I remained immoveable, and even provoked the girls, who dreaded, I can well believe, any fresh cause of painful excitement, to say on one occasion :

“It would almost seem as if you were hurrying off to avoid poor Richard, who will probably arrive directly after you are gone.”

It was evening, and we were sitting in a circle round a blazing fire, having decided not to light the candles till the last moment.

“I don’t think your brother will hold this opinion,” I replied, “but if he should, is there not one amongst you who will be my champion?”

“I will,” said Mrs. Errol cordially, from the

opposite side, "for I am sure you are too much one of us by this time, not to have a sisterly regard for all my children. I am sorry you cannot stay till the beginning of the year, for I think Mr. Errol told me that Richard—"

"Please ma'am," said a servant opening the door at this critical moment, "could I speak to you a minute?"

And although in all probability it was a matter of the most trifling importance which could have waited the whole evening to be discussed, Mrs. Errol, with her keen domestic instincts, rose immediately, and forgetting her unfinished sentence, followed the woman from the room.

"You have lost something precious, Dora, by Lydia's intrusion," remarked Isabel, with that small spice of bitterness, which had replaced her old, innocently-elfish spirit, "but if you are too modest too recur to the subject yourself, I will

not fail to do so for you the moment mamma returns."

Jenny said:

"Nonsense, as if Dora cared."

And whether Isabel was angry at the rebuke (the least thing made her angry now a days) or really forgot all about it, I am of course unable to say; but anyhow the promise was not kept, and consequently I never knew what Mr. Errol, had told his wife in connection with Richard and my staying till he returned.

The last day at length arrived, and in the twilight we all met and assembled once more round the cheerful fire. It needed to be cheerful now, for there was no other element of cheerfulness amongst us, though we were each of us trying to keep up, determined rather to look forward to some future and happier re-union, than to dwell on the present parting, the bit-

terness of which was enhanced by the heavy shadows on all our hearts.

I supposed that after a year's labour I should get a holiday, but I would wait for the spring and then come over and pay a long visit to the dear friends who had engaged to give me such a hearty welcome. By that time they would be settled in their new home out of London, where Mrs. Errol assured me a room would from the first be appropriated and furnished for me, and where they hoped when I was tired of earning money, I should come and take up my abode as a daughter of the family, to go forth no more into the wide world alone.

The sigh I could not quite repress at this double picture, was echoed gloomily by one of our circle, and although she was sitting a little back from the rest, we knew at once that it must have been Isabel.

■

As all eyes were bent upon her she said with sudden energy :

"I wish I could change places with Dora. I would give the world to go and work hard two or three hundred miles away. Why cannot I be a governess?"

"My love," faltered the poor little mother, in tenderly reproachful tones, "if your home has ceased to give you contentment, you would scarcely find it elsewhere. And if there was a question of Dora's fitness for a governess, how could *you* venture to enter upon such a profession?"

"But my presence here makes you all miserable; I see it, I know it, and I repeat again I wish with all my heart I could be sent away. I envy Dora, in spite of her evident shrinking from the life she has chosen."

"For shame, Bella," said the straightforward, matter of fact Jenny, "can't you imagine how

you are wounding mamma, as well as spoiling our last evening with Dora. I gave you credit for less selfishness than this."

There came a pause when Jane had thus spoken her mind, then a gasping, quickly-stifled sob, and before this could be noticed openly, poor Isabel had pushed back her chair, and hurried out of the room.

The mother and sisters having decided that it was best not to follow her, made some observations in subdued voices to each other, but I heard none of them, for my thoughts had wandered back to my sweet Effie, and I was contrasting the opposite ways in which the same sentiment had affected her and Isabel Errol, and learning, I hope, by this new lesson, to appreciate still further that marvellous grace which had alone caused them to differ.

But, as Jane had truly said, the evening was entirely spoiled; and finding it impossible, even

after Mr. Errol's return, to bring back the faintest semblance of cheerfulness, we said good night at an early hour, and I was affectionately entreated to go to bed at once as I should have to commence my journey before daylight on the morning.



## CHAPTER XIX.

## THE FRENCH GOVERNESS.

I HAVE, perhaps, already wearied my readers with the number of partings I have had to record, and I must therefore leave them to imagine with what grief of heart, what sinking of spirit I took my last farewell of the family amongst whom I had found a happy home, and who were all in the world I had to cling to.

Excepting indeed one other, whose regard, I sometimes felt I had too little appreciated, but

who came often into my thoughts when they were heavy with a sense of loneliness.

Of my journey, I shall only say that it was as uncomfortable as severe weather, my utter ignorance of continental customs, and a growing dread of the new life before me, could possibly render it. I spoke French as English people who have learnt it in their own country usually speak it, that is to say, I could just make myself understood at the cost of attracting everybody's attention to me each time that I opened my lips. This was not pleasant, neither were a hundred other things that I had nevertheless to put up with during that long and wearisome journey; and yet they were all as nothing compared with that deep inward depression which I could by no means shake off, and which seemed like a foreboding of evil in connection with the destiny that was awaiting me.

On the evening of the fourth day, having slept

only a few hours on the road, worn out in body, and utterly dejected in mind, I arrived at the large town on the banks of the Garonne, near which my employers lived, and where I found a carriage from the chateau waiting to convey me thither.

The driver, after assisting me to get my luggage together, informed me that Madame Boussin, the French governess, was also in town to meet me, and that we were to pick her up at some shop where she had been deposited to execute a commission for Madame la Comtesse.

Knowing nothing then of the strange peculiarity of French manners amongst the lower orders to those above them, I was disposed to feel aggrieved at the man's inclination to be talkative and communicative, but his unconscious, good tempered face soon smoothed down my ruffled English feathers, and I began

to divine intuitively that it would never do to measure the people in a foreign nation by the standard of my home experience.

While the coachman was carefully stowing away my last trunk, I asked him how many miles it was to his master's chateau.

"About eight," he replied, "and the roads are very bad in winter. We shall not be there till long after dark, but when we have taken up Madame Boussin, Mademoiselle must go to the hotel and have some refreshment. It was Monsieur's especial order, and besides it will very certainly be the governess's wish also. She never comes to town without eating."

I thought as we drove through the town, that it was the dirtiest, dullest, and least attractive of any I had ever seen, and I was especially thankful that Monseigneur le Comte de St. Morin preferred his country residence. In the north the costume of the people had been picturesque

and even graceful, but here it was the most frightful and uncouth that could well be imagined, and the loud voices both of men and women giving utterance to a barbarous patois, completed my disgust, and made me seriously question the fact of my being in a land of poetry and romance.

At length the carriage stopped at the door of a fashionable milliner's, from the interior of which came running out immediately a short, stout woman, exceedingly well dressed, and looking so eager and animated that I would have given much for the privilege of closing my eyes and excluding the vision.

"Quick, quick, Jean Pierre," she exclaimed to the driver, pointing to a heap of parcels and boxes on the counter; "put all these in the carriage instantly; we have not a moment to lose."

Then, stretching out her left hand to me:

“ Ah, my dear mademoiselle, how enchanted I am to see you. Quite a treat to come to fetch you to-day. The town is always so gay and delightful. Pity we cannot stay to show you some of its attractions; but you must be dying with hunger, and at any rate *I* am. Thank you, I shall find plenty of room; you are thin and elegant in your figure, and quite an English face, which I always admire so much. You speak French of course, but I shall be glad to learn English while we are together. Now, Jean Pierre, to the hotel immediately, Mademoiselly is faint for want of her dinner.”

It is a literal fact that she never gave me time to reply to a single question or observation, but continued talking herself without the slightest intermission (even when the rattling of the wheels over the rough stones of those dreadful streets made it impossible for me to catch one word out of twenty) until we were set down at the door

of an hotel that looked to me as rambling, and dirty, and comfortless, as everything else I had hitherto seen in the sunny south.

Thanks, however, to the combined influences of Monsieur le Comte de St. Morin's carriage and Madame Boussin's extraordinary energy, a very good dinner was served to us in a very short space of time, and I had an opportunity of observing that my companion's talents were not restricted to talking alone. She ate of every dish placed before us (and there was, I thought, a great and needless variety) with an evident enjoyment and a concentration of all her powers upon the work in hand, that was equally new and curious to me.

I was of course both tired and hungry myself, but one dish sufficed to satisfy me, and I begged permission to leave the table and warm my half frozen feet by the bright wood fire at the other end of the room.

"Go, go, *ma petite*," said Madame, becoming quite affectionate in her intense contentment; "but you have eaten nothing, absolutely nothing. Ah, what a pity, and so many delicious dishes to choose from. For my part I take a little of all; they cook well at this house, nearly as well as at the chateau—but drink some wine, it will do you good. You are pale like death. *Pauvre petite!* I am afraid you will *ennuyer* in the country. *Ma foi* how dull it is!"

At length the elaborate meal was at an end, and after having toasted her feet and pretty little warm boots at the fire beside which I was sitting, wrapt in my gloomy thoughts, Madame Boussin rang for the horses to be put to the carriage again, and in a few minutes we were on our road to the chateau.

Having anticipated nothing less than a continuation of the half incomprehensible babbling that my companion had hitherto indulged in, I



was agreeably surprised to find before we were well out of the town that she had fallen fast asleep; and although her loud snoring was anything but musical, it was at least preferable to the frantic efforts of her tongue in a language that was yet unfamiliar to me.

I had therefore perfect freedom to wander in dreamland (it was a dismal enough place just then) for the next two hours, long before the expiration of which a friendly veil of darkness had been drawn over the flat, snow-covered landscape, and I had nothing to look at but the carriage lamps, and Madame's nodding head and bonnet.

The coachman had stopped two or three times to do something to his wheels or harness, and on each of these occasions he had obligingly looked in at the window to inform me how many miles we had travelled, and to ask me if I was cold.

I *was* cold, and therefore it gave me a

momentary gleam of satisfaction when for the fourth and last time he presented himself with the information that in a little quarter of an hour we should be at home.

But at that moment the French governess awoke, like a giant refreshed, and commenced immediately a perfect volley of apologies for the *impolitesse* of which she had been guilty.

I assured her in my wretched French that it was nothing, and that I was glad she had been able to rest after her long drive.

"Oh, you are so good, so amiable," she exclaimed enthusiastically; "they will be charmed with you at Chateau Morin. If only you can keep from dying of ennui; but it is difficult, it is next to impossible. Ah, *pauvre petite*, and I suppose you have left a happy home in England."

As this was a subject that I could not and would not touch upon, I said quickly :

"But if it is so dull at the chateau, how is it that Madame la Comtesse contrives to amuse herself?"

"Amuse herself!" (in a half-surprised, half-mocking voice); "oh, *la chere dame* does not amuse herself at all. Quite the contrary, I assure you."

"And yet she stays there the whole year round, does she not?"

"*Ma foi*, yes; and so do the trees in the garden stay where Monsieur chooses them to be planted. That is easy enough to understand; but how frightfully cold it is getting. Jean Pierre drives like a person asleep; how stupid he is!"

"I suppose the children will have gone to bed when we arrive?"

"Oh, no; Monsieur will have them sit up to receive you. He holds greatly to etiquette and ceremony. Such a fine, stately gentleman,

descended from one of the oldest and noblest families in France. You will admire him immensely."

"And Madame? Is she not very beautiful?"

"She was some time ago, the poor, dear lady! and many think her so still; but she does not amuse herself; she never *has* amused herself since her marriage, so what will you? Beauty cannot stand against ennui."

"Are the little girls intelligent?" I asked next.

"Oh, one cannot complain of them, these poor children; but Monsieur is very rigid in all his notions, and they have no companion of their own age, and few pleasures. It is not a bit like a French family, *ma foi, non*."

I closed my eyes wearily, deciding that monsieur le comte must be a very formidable if not a very disagreeable person indeed, and as my companion had to collect her numerous packages we did not speak again until the sudden turning

of the carriage brought us to the solid looking iron gates that formed the barrier of separation between Chateau Morin and the busy world beyond.

Madame Boussin, lively little Frenchwoman that she was, heaved a deep sigh as we passed through these gloomy portals, and heard them close heavily behind us; and some words in which *triste vie* were alone comprehensible to my unpractised ears, became a commentary upon the sigh that was sufficiently suggestive.

"We are arrived then," I said, determined if possible to avoid just now all communion with my own dreary thoughts.

"We are arrived, mademoiselle," was the reply in a tone so sorrowful that I should have pitied the speaker, had she not immediately added with a startling transition to the most eager animation, "and I hope they have got us something nice for supper."

It was too dark as we descended from the carriage to permit of my passing a fair judgment upon the chateau, even had I been in a mood to examine or criticise it, but I could not help remarking that as far as the outside was concerned it had very little of that aristocratic appearance, which, in England, we naturally connect with the name of castle.

The entrance hall however, which was dimly lighted, appeared ancient, lofty, and ghostly enough to justify the expectations I had formed as to the romantic character of the dwelling, where for a time I was to find a home, and as I followed my conductress along several narrow brick paved corridors, each lighted by a single lamp, I began to understand that if Madame la Comtesse was of a gay and sociable disposition, this was certainly not a place in which she was likely to amuse herself.

At length we came into rather a brighter and warmer passage, and with an encouraging "*nous voilà enfin*," Madame Boussin opened gently a door towards the farther end, and introduced me into the presence—the august presence I ought to say—of Monsieur and Madame de St. Morin.

They were sitting at a little round table by a large fire playing at chess, and on two stools opposite to them sat two children, dressed in black merino frocks and white collars, and looking as if the effort to keep awake had been a very tremendous one indeed, leaving their little cheeks quite colourless and their great blue eyes heavy and destitute of all animation.

Monsieur and Madame both rose at our entrance, and the former, who was a tall, dark, haughty looking man of about fifty, after bowing, as only Frenchmen *can* bow, made a rather long speech of which I lost more than half, but

comprehended that its purport was to give me a stately welcome to Chateau Morin.

Madame, who seemed considerably younger than her husband, and who struck me at first as anything but beautiful, gave me her left hand to shake, called the children to do me the same honour, and then saying that I must want refreshment, told Madame Boussin to take me into the dining room and cause supper to be served immediately.

I did not want any supper but I wanted to get into some corner that I might call my own, so as soon as we were in the dining room I entreated my fellow governess to dispense with my company at table and to take me at once upstairs.

After expressing in exaggerated terms her despair at my not being able to eat, she complied good naturedly with this request. And conducting me to a large brick tiled room with a good



fire in it and a luxurious looking bed, assured me I need not be afraid of ghosts as she slept close by, and then left me to the quiet and the repose my mind and body were so eagerly coveting.

## CHAPTER XX.

## THE BEGINNING OF EXILE.

IN spite of the profound and unbroken sleep I enjoyed that night, my awakening was a dreary one, for I had been dreaming of Effie and the first happy days at Lismore Vicarage, when we sat in the leafy woods, or rambled through the autumn fields, or talked gravely together in the quaint old garden; and now I opened my eyes on solitude, with its least attractive accompaniments of winter's chilliest atmosphere, and an

external world that had no beauty to touch or warm the heart, even if its cold, white grandeur could affect the imagination.

My window looked upon the garden, which seemed, from this point of view, to consist of nothing but tall snow-capped trees, overarching dark alleys that all sloped downwards, and led, as I afterwards discovered, to the Garonne, a picturesque boundary to the extensive grounds of Chateau Morin, and separating them from a range of partially wooded hills that rose immediately beyond.

These hills, I could see distinctly from my window, but they were covered now with great patches of snow (I never could discover any attraction in snow), and I could only guess that in summer they might be beautiful.

While I stood gazing and shivering, and feeling that I was indeed in a strange land and among a strange people, a rosy cheeked servant,

having scarcely knocked, walked unceremoniously into the room, with a jug of warm water, and said it was rather late, but that madame would not have me disturbed before. She was going to light the fire immediately, and would I take *café au lait* or chocolate for my first breakfast?

I told the girl that I did not need a fire, and that I would dress and come down-stairs in half an hour; but she only laughed and said, "Yes, yes," and ran to fetch the wood, desiring rather than recommending me to get into bed again.

Finding the fire determined on, I had really no other resource, and considering the cold, it was not such a very disagreeable necessity. I asked if it was the custom at the chateau for all the family to breakfast in their rooms, and was informed that everybody took a cup of coffee or chocolate on first awaking, and afterwards breakfasted together at twelve o'clock exactly, as

monsieur was a gentleman of the strictest punctuality.

Having decided upon coffee and a bit of dry toast, I had not long to wait for these delicacies, which were served to me on a small silver tray, and with as much nicety as if I had been the countess herself, instead of a poor English governess.

The girl remained chatting with me all the time I was eating and drinking, and then offered her assistance in the toilette duties that were to come next. These, however, I declined gratefully, and being wonderfully refreshed by that cup of excellent coffee, I made haste to dress, and had just finished, when Madame Boussin (in a rather untidy morning costume) came to take me down-stairs.

We found the children with their books and slates beside a huge fire in the dining room, and after establishing me in a delightful arm chair,

with no end of cushions, the French governess began her duties as instructress, warning me that she should have done with her pupils for the first part of the day by eleven o'clock.

"But you do not intend me to be idle during the interval?" I said enquiringly; "if I had any paper unpacked, I could be preparing some easy exercises for them."

"No, no," she replied, with a kindly shrug of her little fat shoulders, "you look too pale and sad for any hard work yet. You can talk English with these poor children to-day, and that will be quite enough for a beginning. Sit there and warm your feet, and if you like to read, madame has plenty of novels she can lend you."

I assured her I could sit still without the aid of a novel, and then she returned to the children, who struck me as looking more dull and lifeless than any children ought to look, and I leant

back on my soft cushions and warmed my feet till a message came to summon me to the dressing room of madame la comtesse.

The husband and wife were again sitting together, she with a book and he with a newspaper before him, but on my entrance monsieur rose, bowed with the same grand condescension that he had manifested the night before, hoped I had rested well, and went out.

"Take this chair, mademoiselle," said the lady, pointing to the one her husband had vacated, which was just opposite her own, "I shall be glad of your society for a few minutes."

I obeyed silently, feeling that for a person who wanted to be amused I was about the worst companion in the world, with the weight on my heart and spirits that nothing here seemed likely to take off.

"You speak French of course?" continued the comtesse kindly, "but as this is your first visit

to France, I do not expect you to speak it perfectly. You must not be timid with me, for I have been looking forward to your coming. We are not gay at the chateau, and a stranger who can bring intelligence from the outer world, from another country, especially, must be a most welcome addition to our family. I hope Madame Boussin has been attentive to you?"

"She has been very kind," I answered readily, "nothing has been wanting to make me feel at home in your house, madame, but my spirits have been depressed for some time in consequence of the death of a very dear friend. By and by I hope it will be different."

The lady smiled with unmistakable bitterness.

"I am sorry for your sake that you have come where there is so little chance of getting rid of a regret of this nature. I don't suppose in all France you would find so dull a family as ours.



The very children are withering under the influence of this unnatural dullness. Don't you miss something in them which other children possess?"

"They do not look very lively certainly, but the winter is not a lively season in the country. In the summer it must be very beautiful here."

The sigh that answered this, expressed such utter, infinite, unspeakable weariness that I could not help looking up hastily at my *vis à vis*. That one glance revealed to me how lovely she must have been, and how strange and complete a wreck she had become. I don't know whether she read alarm, or mystification, or undue curiosity in my face, but her tone changed abruptly, and with a true Frenchwoman's laugh, she said:

"If your thought could speak, mademoiselle, it would tell me that of all the dull things at the chateau I am myself the dullest, and this would

be true, though had you known me ten years ago—ten years!” and her voice again dropped into its former plaintive notes, “it is a long time to a poor prisoner, but nothing to the free and happy. I say had you known me ten years ago, mademoiselle, you would not have accused me of dullness.”

Feeling that to refrain from any observations would seem like a want of interest, I said interrogatively :

“You were naturally gay and light hearted then, like most of your countrywomen?”

“More than all of them, I believe,” she replied, with another sigh, that denoted as much impatience as sadness; “but why should I look back to a time and a state of feeling that can never, never return! Mademoiselle, I am wearying you to death at our very first interview. I wanted to ask you if I am too old to learn English?”

“By no means. If you really desire to learn you will find it the easiest thing in the world.”

“At all events I will try. Anything to get through this fearful winter. The children need not employ much of your time, and you can come to me for a couple of hours every morning.”

“I will not fail to do so.”

“And you must endeavour to make yourself at home here, mademoiselle. My library is at your disposal, and you will always have a fire in your bedroom, so that if you want to read or write in quiet there will be a secure retreat for you. Madame Boussin is a good natured harmless person, but she is no companion for anybody. Her two ideas are eating and dress, and these in the end become wearisome. She is however a gentlewoman both by birth and education, and on her father's side rejoices in rather a long pedigree, which in the eyes of my husband covers a multitude of sins.

The clock on the mantel-piece struck eleven.

"Shall I go now to the children?" I asked.

"Madame Boussin said she should have done with them at eleven."

"Yes, go if you will. And remember that from to-day your hours with me will be from one till three, while Monsieur is out walking or shooting."

As I rose to leave the room Monsieur le Comte entered by an opposite door, and I could not help remarking the look of gloomy annoyance that the lady's face assumed as her husband took his former seat again.

Perhaps, I thought to myself, weariness is not the only thing this poor woman is dying of.

I gave the children a short introductory lesson, and was pleased to find that they were both of them moderately intelligent and remarkably docile. When this was ended they told me they

must make themselves neat for breakfast, and we all went upstairs together, meeting Madame Boussin in an elegant morning toilette hastening down to take her place at the table.

The husband and wife came into the dining-room arm in arm, and during the whole of the meal (which lasted a considerable time) Monsieur paid all sorts of attention to Madame, who received them with a careless indifference that I thought it wonderful he did not notice. Very little conversation took place, as Madame Boussin ate of every dish at table, and had consequently no time for talking, and my own imperfect knowledge of the language and increasing awe of the master of the chateau, obliged me to answer in monosyllables every question he condescended to address me. As for Madame la Comtesse, she only spoke a few words from time to time with the children, or when compelled to

refuse her husband's earnest solicitations that she would partake more freely of the various dishes which she had to choose from.

I was thankful when it was over, and the family, separating for awhile, gave me an opportunity of going to my room to write letters to England. Madame Boussin told me the children would be taken out to walk for a couple of hours if they did not drive with their mamma, and that if I felt disposed to see the grounds she should be ready to accompany me at two o'clock. As the sun was shining brightly, in spite of the continued cold, I accepted this offer, and my love of nature found ample satisfaction in the wild romantic character of the woods and gardens through which my companion led me. The absence of that elaborate cultivation which in a similar place we should see in England was rather a charm than the reverse; and although Madame la Comtesse *was* a Frenchwoman, I wondered

that with such beauties around her, she should be unable to extract from them at least some little enjoyment to atone for the want of society and amusement.

After our walk, the children resumed their lessons till dinner time, which, with the exception of a greater variety of dishes and some addition to the toilettes of all the party, was an exact transcript of the breakfast.

In the evening Monsieur and Madame again played at chess, she doing this, and indeed everything else while in her husband's presence, like a machine that has been set in motion by the master who is watching calmly the success of his experiment. Madame Boussin dozed in an easy chair over a piece of embroidery that the children had to pick up from the ground every five minutes. They, poor things, looked at some English picture books I had brought with me, and I, in obedience to a request from

Monsieur, played several French operas on their grand piano. And so the heavy time went by till ten o'clock, when we all separated, without much apparent regret, till the next morning.

And in this manner, with very little variation, were spent all the winter evenings at Chateau Morin.



## CHAPTER XXI.

## MONSIEUR AND MADAME.

"I CONGRATULATE you, mademoiselle," said the Comtesse one afternoon, as I went into the dressing room to give my usual lesson; "you have had letters from England, and I see by your face that they have been pleasant ones."

"I believe," I replied, "that the mere fact of receiving a letter at all at this distance from home would make me supremely happy; but those I have had this morning are from very

dear and intimate friends, and they have certainly brought some sunshine with them."

"Sunshine at chateau Morin!" she exclaimed, with one of her bitterest laughs. "I would that even a fraction of it were transferable; but sit down, mademoiselle, and talk to me for a little while of your happiness. I am not in the humour for studying yet."

She might as reasonably have asked me to fetch her down the sun, whose bright beams were streaming into the room and dancing upon its gaily papered walls, as bid me talk to *her* of my happiness.

I could only repeat that the letters I had received were from friends I highly esteemed, and the loss of whose society I was still feeling acutely.

"But tell me, mademoiselle," said my companion abruptly, "whether it would be the greatest punishment to you to be deprived for ever of the society of those who are so dear to

you, or to be condemned to live constantly with a person you hated and loathed with your whole heart, and every faculty of your nature?"

The question surprised me less than it would have done on my first coming into the family, and yet it was an awkward one to answer. I said at length:

"I can conceive of no earthly trial that would be greater to me than the knowledge that I was separated for ever from those I love, but of course it would be no inconsiderable punishment to live with one I hated."

"Ah," she replied, becoming pale and almost repulsive looking as she spoke, "you don't know what it is to hate. Thank God for it, and be content with any state of feeling that comes short of this! How is it, mademoiselle, with your personal attractions" (French people always flatter), "and various accomplishments, that you have never married?"

Her voice and features had resumed their usual tone and expression as she put this question.

"I have never had any temptation to do so, madame."

"You don't mean to tell me you have never had an offer?"

"I have had one certainly, only one, and that I declined."

"You did not love the gentleman, or he was not rich enough to satisfy you?"

"I did not love him well enough to become his wife; he was many years older than myself."

"You did well, then, not to marry him, very well. And was he proud and imperious, and fastidious about every little trifle?"

"I don't know, but I should think not. He was original and accomplished, and to me at least ever most kind, and friendly, and attentive."

“And yet you could not like him?”

“I liked him very much, but I did not love him. His daughter was my dearest friend; it is for her I am in mourning.”

“Then he has lost his daughter and you too. Poor desolate man!”

“Yes, he is very lonely. I think of him often.”

“Mademoiselle, I would wager anything you please that you will marry this gentleman.”

The abruptness and earnestness of her exclamation certainly startled me, recalling for a moment Mr. Seymour's own confident impressions on the subject; but I shook my head and said, “Oh, no, never!” with an energy that silenced my companion, if it did not convince her.

It was the first time since I had been at the chateau that Madame la Comtesse had ever questioned me about my own private history. Concerning England and English customs and

manners, her enquiries were frequent and minute, but beyond this she seemed to have no interest, and for many reasons I had not the smallest inclination to make a *confidante* of her. In the first place she was so evidently and entirely engrossed in her own personal sorrows, that there could be no room in her heart for sympathy with the trials of others; in the second place there was something about her that I could by no means understand, but which filled me at times with a vague terror; and in the last place I estimated my very griefs as far too sacred to be communicated to any of the people amongst whom I was now living.

Of course the daily lessons I gave to Madame afforded ample opportunities for private conversation, and hitherto I had been invariably the listener, and she the talker.

Generally it was of her youthful life she spoke the most, deriving it appeared, a kind of morbid

satisfaction (sometimes it was quite a savage one) in dwelling upon the picture of what she was in heart, and mind, and person before her marriage. I gathered that in accordance with the French customs, the match had been formed by her parents, who esteemed the rank and very ancient lineage of the Comte de St. Morin more than sufficient to outweigh the trifling disadvantages of his additional years and reputed pride and unsociability of character. He was not wholly a Frenchman, his mother having been a German lady, also of high birth and eccentric disposition, in whose country and under whose tutelage her son remained till he had attained the age of manhood.

I learned too that in the early years of the married life of this ill-assorted couple, when the lady's friends had still sufficient influence over the husband to induce him to take her occasionally into society, that his jealousy had almost

driven them both to madness, and that much as she detested the seclusion of their present existence, she had little inclination to return to the gay world with her former companion at her side.

Their history reminded me continually of an episode in one of Browning's poems, where he makes a stately earl describe his third countess (I believe) to one of his friends who had been questioning him about her.

"Sir, 'twas all one; my favour at her breast  
The dropping of the daylight in the west;  
The bough of cherries some officious fool  
Broke in the orchard for her—the white mule  
She rode on round the terrace. All and each  
Would draw from her alike the forward speech  
Or blush at least. She thanked men—good; but thank'd  
Some, how? I know not how—as if she rank'd  
My gift of a nine-hundred-years' old name  
With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame  
This sort of trifling? Even had you skill  
In speech (which I have not) could make your will  
Quite clear to such an one, and say, 'Just this  
Or that, in you disgusts me; here you miss  
Or there exceed the mark.' And if she let  
Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set  
Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse  
E'en then would be some stooping and I choose  
Never to stoop. Oh, sir, she smiled no doubt  
Whene'er I passed her; but who pass'd without  
Much the same smile? This grew, I gave command,  
Then all smiles stopped together."



Thus much, I repeat, of the history of Monsieur and Madame de St. Morin was on the surface, patent to everybody endowed with the most meagre faculty of observation, and would soon have been clear to me, even had I heard nothing from others on the subject. But beyond all this, or rather below all this, there was an under current (as far as the wife was concerned) which I could only glimpse at occasionally, and which, as I have said before, filled me with a sickening dread that was not the less harassing from its vagueness.

I thought sometimes that had I been a demonstrative person and evinced any inclination to meet her half-way, Madame would have been much more confidential with me than she really was; for in spite of her constant habit of speaking of herself and her own feelings, I had gathered little concerning the present from her actual confessions beyond the fact of her being

supremely miserable, and a victim to the most insupportable ennui.

And yet every now and then she seemed on the point of extending her unsought confidences, and was, I suppose, only restrained by my English coldness, on the subject of which she had more than once spoken rather bitterly.

Of the proud and stately husband I necessarily obtained but a very limited knowledge, since we never met but at meals and then he rarely addressed me. I judged that he loved his wife by the constant and unremitting attentions he paid her, notwithstanding the almost insulting indifference with which those attentions were usually received; but I could not help thinking that his love arose as much from the fact of Madame de St. Morin being his property—a part, though of course an inferior part, of his magnificent and aristocratic self—as from any virtues or attractive powers that the lady possessed.

The only guests I had hitherto seen at the chateau were two priests, the confessors of the master and mistress of the house. They were both rather old men, of quiet, unobtrusive manners, and one or other of them generally dined with the family about once a week.

But to return, after this long digression, to the day on which Madame had been conversing with me on the subject of my own private affairs, finding I was disposed to make no further admissions, she said abruptly :

“ Tell me now, mademoiselle, if a woman in your country is unfortunate enough to be very unhappy in her married life, what resource is there for her—what does she do?”

“ I believe in most cases she bears her burden in silence, but there have been examples of wives leaving their husbands and returning to their own families.”

“ And if they have no independent property, and their families are too poor to receive them,

or shrink from causing a scandal in the world, what then?"

"I can scarcely answer you, having lived so little in general society; but I presume that a woman of education would be able at the worst to provide, by the exercise of her talents, for herself."

"But if there are children?"

"In my country, the father, however bad he may be, can always claim the children; and this, I believe, is the reason why so many unhappy wives continue to reside with their husbands."

"And then you English have colder and calmer blood than we have. You can endure and smile serenely over wrongs that would tempt us to commit suicide, or something worse!"

"Perhaps our religion as well as our cold blood may have something to do with this," I said, wishing heartily she would have her lesson and let me go away.

“ Ah, I don’t know much about your religion, mademoiselle, but if it gives strength and patience under suffering, it must be well worth having. I doubt it, however, because ours, with all its stern requirements, has no power of the kind.”

“ You are forbidden to read the Bible, the only book that can teach you what true religion is. Ah, Madame, if you had seen, as I have, a sincere professor of this holy religion on a death-bed !”

She shuddered violently, and became very pale.

“ Pray, mademoiselle, don’t talk to me of death-beds. It will give me the spleen—that terrible malady from which you poor English people are always suffering. Come, let us begin the lesson now. You are certainly not amusing to-day.”

We had wasted so much time, that before the lesson was finished, Monsieur came in from his walk.

"See, Eugénie," he said, laying a bunch of purple violets beside his wife's exercise book, "I have spent at least an hour in collecting these flowers for you. They are the first of the season, and I thought you would be pleased with them. Your room is already fragrant with their perfume."

"Thank you," replied the lady coldly, and without even looking up; "but it is a pity you took so much trouble, as the gardener could have gathered them just as well."

The Comte neither sighed nor looked offended. He only added a log of wood to the fire, and sat down with a newspaper to wait till our lesson should be over.

## CHAPTER XXII.

## LAUGHING SPRING.

THE letters I had received, and concerning the effect of which Madame de St. Morin had congratulated me, were from Richard and Catherine Errol, and besides being full of kindness and affection, they contained much information that gave me pleasure.

Richard told me of Mr. Seymour's entire restoration to health, and of the strong hopes he

himself entertained, that Effie's death had touched her father's heart with something better than mere human grief for his bereavement. He no longer spoke of resigning his living, and only retained his curate to assist him in the discharge of his duties, and because he had learned to value this young man very highly, and to find real satisfaction in his society.

Then Richard wrote a little, a very little this first time, on those subjects which he had given me to understand would occupy a prominent part in his letters; and he concluded with an earnest request that I would look upon him as a brother, and write or abstain from writing, just as I felt disposed, without imagining that he could ever do otherwise than think well of one, who had been so warm and true a friend to his dear, lost Effie.

Catherine's letter was just a narrative of home news, every scrap of which she rightly



judged would be full of interest for me. They had taken a large house with a beautiful garden on Highgate Hill, and were to remove from Bloomsbury Square early in the summer. Isabel still continued in the same state of painful depression, but there was a talk of her going with Mrs. Errol to spend some weeks at Lismore Vicarage, which they all hoped would prove of great benefit to her. Jane had been down for a few days while Richard was still there, and she had enjoyed it so much, and praised the place so enthusiastically, that poor Bella was roused at last to express a faint wish to go.

Concerning Richard, Catherine only said that they hoped he was getting over his loss, but that his profession occupied more of his time than ever, and that he was rarely at home above an hour any evening. Mr. Vincent had written his condolences on the subject of Effie's death, and his letter hinted at the probability of his

leaving his mother on the continent, and returning to England in the spring.

There was a great deal besides all this of minor interest, and many comments on what I had told my friends in London concerning my arrival and first impressions of Chateau Morin and its inhabitants. It was, indeed, a long, delightful letter, which could well bear several readings, and no one can be surprised that this, with the other that accompanied it, sufficed to cheer and amuse my leisure for many days after they had been received, and to gild even that gloomy old house with a brightness that of itself it never put on.

The spring was now advancing rapidly, and a very beautiful spring it was, such an one as we read of as belonging to England's good old days, but which has no existence now, except in the memory of the oldest inhabitant.

The gardens of Chateau Morin became splen-

didly majestic with their wealth of flowers and perfumes; the Garonne glanced and sparkled in the cloudless sunshine; the hills beyond were clothed with the richest and greenest verdure, and everything outside our prison house breathed of life and hope and gladness.

In some respects we all felt the benefit of departing winter, for not only could we walk or drive every day (the Comte had placed a carriage at the disposal of Madame Boussin and myself), but even our studies could be pursued in the open air, and in studios that the very fairies might have envied us.

The children were beginning to lose their listless, unchildlike appearance, and to play with the birds and butterflies, as if they entered somewhat into the restless, fluttering joy of these bright parasites of spring. Madame Boussin came out in gay, new summer dresses, ate less substantial food, and alluded rather less fre-

quently to the *triste vie* to which we were condemned. Monsieur de St. Morin went more frequently to the town, and always brought back some elegant and loverlike present to madame, and madame herself, though she smiled no oftener, and expressed no more interest in anything around her, came sometimes and walked with me for an hour or two in the avenue by the river, and seemed really trying to feel as others felt.

Perhaps it may be considered that I ought now to have been quite happy and contented with my position. Many no doubt, under the same circumstances, would have been, and perhaps had destiny led me hither immediately after my step-mother's death, it might have been so with me. But the bestowment of friendship, sympathy and congenial companionship had created a want in my heart which nothing short of these priceless blessings could satisfy. At the chateau

I had much kindness and consideration shown me, but I had no friend and no companion, and notwithstanding many other advantages I felt increasingly and painfully in want of both.

Nature, my old idol, smiled indeed bewitchingly upon me, and invited me continually, in spite of my faithless desertion of her shrine, to return to my former worship, but I knew and felt at last, that one smile from the lips we love is worth all the blandishments of this cold goddess, and one whisper of real affection dearer than the softest zephyrs that ever come from the balmy west.

And besides this natural craving of my heart for actual and personal sympathy, I wanted somebody to whom I could impart my constantly growing apprehensions concerning the unhappy Comtesse. I dared not trust my vague fears and suspicions to a letter, which I was even unable to post myself, and to speak of them to Madame

Boussin would have been worse than useless, since her mind never saw below the surface of anything, and she would only have shrugged her plump shoulders, and told me I was afflicted with the spleen.

And then what, after all, could I have said? What form or shape could I have given to the wild and distorted fancies which were for ever troubling my poor restless brain. Madame had confided nothing to me. I had gained no secret information, I had found no suspicious letters, I had dreamt no prophetic dreams.

All I knew was that the Comtesse de St. Morin hated her husband, loathed her present life, and that a great struggle of some kind or other was going on in her soul.

She had made already a most remarkable progress in English, and we often now conversed together in my native tongue. Her interest in

the country too had by no means abated, and I could not help arriving at the conclusion that she had at least some idea of seeking one day a home on its friendly soil.

It was a great satisfaction to me that I had been in no degree restricted in my instructions to the children, and that neither of the parents had ever questioned me as to what books I read with them or gave them to read.

Richard, in one of his letters had earnestly recommended me, in the event of there being no distinct prohibition, to teach them constantly from our Protestant Bible, suggesting that it might be their only chance of ever getting a glimpse of the unadulterated truth. In accordance with this advice from him (whom I was well pleased to call my master) I made them read two or three chapters to me daily, and, as well as my own imperfect knowledge would permit, I explained to them the spirit of the New Testament.

One day when we had been thus engaged, sitting under the shadow of a bending Catalpa in the garden, Adeline, the eldest girl, suddenly exclaimed :

“ Oh, here comes mamma, mademoiselle, so as she is sure to want to talk to you, let Marguerite and me go and play for half an hour.”

The permission was readily given, and the Comtesse after stooping to kiss her laughing children, sighing gloomily as she did so, advanced into the shade of the tree, and took one of the chairs they had just vacated.

“ It is warm this morning, mademoiselle. Are you not almost tired of teaching ?”

“ No, for indeed I have little enough of labour here, and the children, to say nothing of madame, are very quick and intelligent.”

“ You are learning some of our French habits, I see, mademoiselle, but what have you here ? What book is it that the children have been reading ?”



“The Bible, madame.”

“You are not aware, then that this is a forbidden book to the Catholics?”

“You never forbade me to use it, madame, and I am not bound to obey the requirements of a system against which my reason and conscience most loudly protest. Believe me your little girls will not become worse members of society, or worse daughters, for knowing something of the truth of God.”

“You are eloquent, mademoiselle, and unfortunately I am neither an arguer nor a theologian. Perhaps indeed you are right in what you assert, therefore go on with the studies you have begun; only don't leave the book lying about for Monsieur or the priests to see.”

I felt really grateful for this ready and unquestioning confidence, and was on the point of expressing my thanks, when madame startled me by saying abruptly:

“In your religion, mademoiselle, are you

taught that repentance for a great crime will bring you absolution—I do not mean absolution by a priest, but the forgiveness of God, and salvation in the next world?”

“Our religion knows nothing of repentance as an atonement for sin,” I said nervously; “it recognizes only the blood of Christ as the one perfect and all-sufficient sacrifice for the iniquity of mankind. Repentance is certainly inseparable from salvation, but it is simply an evidence of Christian life, and not that life itself.”

The Comtesse shook her head.

“My brain is far too obtuse, mademoiselle, to take in these profound mysteries. But tell me, in plainer language, what provision there is in the protestant religion for those who have sinned wilfully and enormously. With us, severe penance, almsgiving, and seclusion for life in a convent, are deemed sufficient atonement for most offences.”

I don't know what spirit of incaution or forgetfulness urged me to say :

“We have no provisions against any premeditated crime, and although none may dare limit the mercy of the Most High, still I should have little hope of pardon for one who, instead of seeking grace to be kept from sin, recklessly committed it, with the intention of asking forgiveness when it was done.”

The Comtesse had flushed deeply when I first began speaking, but before I had finished she was whiter than the muslin dress she wore, and though her fingers were busy in dissecting some roses she had taken from her girdle, I could see that they were trembling violently.

“Let us walk, mademoiselle,” she said in a dry, husky tone, “and perhaps the fresh air from the river may inspire us with a more cheerful subject of conversation.”

## CHAPTER XXIII.

## MONSIEUR'S JOURNEY.

I remarked at this time that the Father Confessor of Madame began to come less regularly to the chateau, and one day I asked her why it was.

"Oh," she replied with affected indifference, "he has not been invited, that's all. Monsieur having a confessor of his own, only has *Pere Hyppolite* here when I want him, and lately the

good man has wearied me. Besides," and she laughed that bitter laugh which I so much disliked, "what can I possibly have to confess, shut up in this old dungeon?"

"You know," I said, "that in my religion we protest against confession to a priest at all, but as far as sin is concerned, I believe both you and myself are quite as capable of committing it here as in the midst of the gay and busy world."

"Ah, Mademoiselle, you have I see peculiar notions about many things. I think, however, with you, that it is the height of absurdity to tell all our thoughts and feelings to a man who only differs from other men because he shaves the top of his head, and wears a black gown."

"If you said as much to Monsieur le Comte, he would suspect me of having infected you with my protestant heresy."

"No matter if he did, but I am not a protes-

ant any the more for seeing some of the absurdities of Catholicism. Your religion is too tame and spiritless to have much attraction for me, but it seems to suit you cold and passionless English."

"All English people, Madame, are not cold and passionless."

"More or less; but I beg your pardon, Mademoiselle, that constant and persevering correspondent of yours, who is neither father nor brother, must have some warmth in him where-with he is endeavouring to thaw the ice of your nature; otherwise he would have left off writing long ago."

"Why, Madame?"

"Because he would have grown weary of importuning you in vain. I presume it is the gentleman you once told me about, who still hopes to win your reluctant heart and hand."

"Oh, no, Madame. My correspondent is the

son and brother of my friends in London, the young man who was engaged to be married to that dear little friend I lost just before coming here."

"Then he has soon consoled himself it seems. And when are you to be married, Mademoiselle?"

"Oh, Madame, there is no question of anything of the kind. He loved too deeply ever to love again, and only writes to me as a brother, and because my devotion to her whom he had lost has gained me a place in his esteem."

The Comtesse raised her beautiful eyes and looked at me wonderingly for a minute or two.

"How droll and incomprehensible you are, you English," she said at length, with a little supercilious smile. "In our country such things could not be, or if they were, nobody would believe in their assumption of platonism. But pardon me, mademoiselle, if I say that you must learn

not to blush so charmingly when speaking of your correspondent, before you can expect a naughty world to give you credit for regarding him as a brother."

I was annoyed, and would gladly have changed the subject altogether, but I am sure Madame had taken lately a kind of pleasure in thwarting me, and heedless of my cold looks she said now:

"But that other lover whom you so cruelly rejected; does he never write to renew his proposals?"

"Never."

"Poor man! you can't think how sincerely I pity him. His very silence invests him with an additional interest. Tell me, Mademoiselle, with that amiable frankness which is a part of your character, do you not sometimes regret your decision, and wish you were gladdening that lonely home in England, instead of vegetating in this dreary hopeless place?"



"No, I have never yet regretted it."

"But you think of him occasionally?"

"Yes, very often. I should be glad to hear that he had found a wife to suit him."

"He is waiting for you."

"I hope not, for he would certainly wait in vain."

"Then you love the other—the faithful correspondent."

"Madame—"

"I beg your pardon; that dignified English look teaches me I am on forbidden ground. Perhaps, Mademoiselle, as you pass through the dining-room you will tell Madame Boussin that I shall want the children to take a drive with me."

I was too glad to leave her on any terms, but after this conversation, and her whole manner on the occasion, I felt convinced of what I had suspected before, namely, that Madame la Comtesse would not be sorry to get rid of me.

I was not particularly distressed by the reflection, for in truth I was wearying of my position, and had it not been for Richard's letters, which came always like a gentle, friendly voice stealing over the troubled waters, I should have endured it even worse than I did. But I had one or two strong reasons for deciding on taking no active steps for leaving the chateau at present, and I did not anticipate that Madame would have the courage to tell me in plain language to go.

It was not very long after the scene above recorded, that Monsieur received a letter informing him of the approaching death of a near relative in a distant part of France, and requiring his immediate presence there.

Madame communicated the intelligence to me one morning when I went to give her the English lesson, and made no attempt to conceal the intense gratification she derived from the pros-

pect of her husband's absence. I felt disgusted, for whatever faults of pride or intolerance the Comte might possess, I had never seen him otherwise than most kind and devoted to his wife, and I only asked when he was to start.

"This evening, at eight o'clock," replied Madame, with sparkling eyes, "so remember, Mademoiselle, we dine at half-past six exactly. I shall defer my walk till after Monsieur is gone."

I did not see the Comte till dinner time, and then it was very evident to me that he suffered considerably at the thought of leaving home. He ate scarcely anything, spoke even less, and apologized for quitting us as soon as the dessert was placed on the table."

I imagined of course that Madame would follow her husband, but she sat perfectly still, drinking her wine and eating her strawberries, and only remarked casually, when I looked up at

her, that Monsieur had orders to give to his servants, and would be busy with them till the moment of starting.

It was the first time he had left his wife or children for a single day since his marriage.

We were all in the drawing-room, pursuing our usual evening occupations, when the Comte came in to say farewell. I fancied that he looked wistfully at the immoveable comtesse, as if he would fain have had a few parting words with her alone, but she only offered her cheek coldly for a kiss, and said in the most indifferent voice, "*Bon voyage, Monsieur.*"

He then wished Madame Boussin and myself good bye, kissed the children several times, and at length went slowly out. The Comtesse had scarcely uttered a deep sigh of relief, when her husband again opened the door and came to her side:

"Eugénie," he said, with some emotion, "I

can't tell you how reluctant I am to leave you; promise me that you will take care of yourself, and if you should feel very dull—(surely, I thought, he must be speaking ironically)—or my absence should be prolonged above a week, you had better send for your brother from Paris."

Whether Madame was grateful for this permission, or that his kindness shamed her into some semblance of right feeling, I cannot tell, but she rose now and went out into the hall with her husband, and we did not see her again until the sound of the carriage wheels had died in the distance.

The whole of that first evening she employed in writing letters.

The next day the carriage was ordered immediately after breakfast, and Marguerite, the youngest child, invited to accompany her mamma to the town.

I asked Madame Boussin whether the Comtesse

had any friends there, but she said no, none, at least, that her husband had permitted her to visit since her marriage. *Cette pauvre chère dame* was doubtless driving about to look at the shops, and amuse herself a bit, now that she had got her liberty.

It was past our usual dinner hour when they returned home; the Comtesse appeared in very good spirits, but no account was rendered of the day's employment. Only when Madame Boussin asked eagerly if the town did not look gay and delightful, the lady graciously replied, that she had better go and judge for herself, and take me and Adeline with her.

"Oh, what happiness!" exclaimed the little fat woman, clasping her hands in ecstasy; "may we go to-morrow, madame?"

"I think you had better wait till the next day, as you must take the chesnuts for the large carriage, and they will be too tired to-morrow."

As I had several purchases I wanted to make, and had never since my arrival been into the town, except on Sundays to the Protestant church (a favour that Monsieur le Comte had considerably accorded to me), I was rather glad of the present opportunity. The day turned out fine, and not overpoweringly warm. Madame Boussin attired herself in her most gorgeous apparel, and putting up the carriage on our arrival at the hotel, declared her intention of walking about till luncheon time, doing a little shopping, and "amusing herself thoroughly."

There was nothing, I think, that ever struck me as more remarkable amongst the unreflecting French people, than this constant reference to amusement as the one great desideratum and business of life.

Being forbidden by the laws or prejudices of a French provincial town to walk a step alone, I was bound to accompany my restless and excited

companion wherever she chose to wander, and that, of course, was wherever any attractive shops, or any portion of what she called the "beau monde," were to be found.

At length, however, even *her* feet grew weary, and passing a tempting looking pastry-cook's, where a cool awning, with tables and benches, and a fence of orange trees in large green pots, invited the thirsty pedestrian to rest and drink, Madame Boussin suddenly paused in her wild career, and suggested that we should make our lunch of cakes and ices *à la vanille*.

As most of the tables were vacant, and it seemed quiet and pleasant, I acceded gladly to her proposal, and had just finished my first ice, madame being already in the midst of her third, when a gentleman walked under the awning, and seated himself at the table next to ours.

I should probably not have remarked him at all (being seated with my back to the table he



selected), had not Madame Boussin, with her mouth full of cake, leaned across and whispered to me in French :

“ Mademoiselle, I would wager a pair of gloves that that gentleman who has just arrived is a countryman of yours.”

Fearing he must have heard and understood her, I waited some time before I ventured to turn round, but when at length I managed, in picking up a fallen glove, to do so, judge of my surprise and pleasure in immediately recognising Arthur Vincent!

He sprang from his chair, and with a look of unmistakable delight shining out from his true, honest, English eyes, came forward with extended hand to greet me.

“ Miss Heathcott, I have been thinking for the last five minutes that it *must* be you, but not daring to speak till I was quite certain. How happy I am to see you. I only arrived this

morning, and was going to write to-day to ask permission to call upon you at your chateau."

"And what are you doing here?" I said, almost breathless with a pleasure that can only be understood by those who have lived for five months without once hearing the accents of their native tongue, or seeing the face of one of their own people.

"I am on my way back to England, and made a slight digression (at the request of your friends in Bloomsbury Square) for the sake of seeing you, and hearing from your own lips whether you are really happy here."

"They are very, very kind to think so much about me."

"They would tell you they could not help it; but I have much to ask you and to talk about. Do you think we may venture to sit down for a few minutes?"

I looked round and discovered that good-

natured Madame Boussin had vanished, leaving word with our little pupil that she should be back presently.

So we resumed our seats, drawing them some few inches nearer together, and entered into a long friendly talk, concerning all that had passed since our last meeting.

Of course Mr. Vincent required me to tell him everything about poor Effie's death, and it needed not the hardly-concealed emotion with which he listened to it to convince me that he was still suffering from the effects of that unfortunate attachment. I changed the subject as quickly as I could, and asked him why he was leaving France before his mother.

"Because I thoroughly dislike it," he replied warmly. "My tastes, habits, feelings, all are downright English, and consequently for ever being shocked and disgusted in this country. I do not deny the charm of first-rate French so-

ciety, but it is a charm that a sober quiet Englishman like myself can well dispense with; and then my mother has got a clique of our own country people around her, and these for the most part are so entirely frivolous, worldly, and reckless of appearances, that I am continually blushing for them and for myself as being in their society."

"And I have been so longing to know even one English person in this strange place!"

"You need not, I assure you; for although doubtless there *are* exceptions, my own experience has led me to think very little of our fair country-women scattered over the continent. The men indeed maintain a good deal of their sturdy national character, but the women appear to think they can never do enough to show their independence of foreign restraint, and, in almost all cases, succeed in making themselves eminently ridiculous."

"I hope at least they preserve the good old English custom of hallowing the Sabbath. It is very revolting to see how it is profaned in this place."

"It would appear to be anything else than revolting to the majority of the English who come abroad. I have heard of them constantly as attending public promenades, races, and even the theatre on the Sabbath day; but don't let us speak of it, Miss Heathcott, for I cannot help feeling a certain degree of bitterness when the subject forces itself upon me, and I only meant to show you that your loss is less than you have hitherto supposed in being restricted solely to French society."

"And you are really going home to dear, dear England! How happy this prospect ought to make you, Mr. Vincent."

"I am glad," he said, but the sigh that followed his words told me how much of his hap-

pinus was buried in that quiet grave in Lismore churchyard.

"And you, Miss Heathcott," he added presently, "I must not forget the commission with which I was entrusted on your account. May I tell your friends in London that you will soon come back to them, or that you are quite contented here?"

"I am not quite contented here," I said in a low voice, "but it would be impossible to enter into any particulars now. I do not, however, contemplate leaving immediately, and you need only tell Mrs. Errol that if she should hear of a desirable situation in England (I believe I am somewhat better qualified for a governess than I was), I should be glad to be informed of it."

"I will deliver your message faithfully; and now about paying you a visit at the chateau, what do you think I had better do?"

"Not pay me a visit, certainly, since we have

been fortunate enough to meet here. The master of the house is absent, and Madame does not like me well enough to avoid saying, even if she does not think, very disagreeable things. The lady with me to-day is the French governess, and I have nothing more serious to fear from her than a little light raillery, which I can well endure after the great pleasure of this delightful interview with an old friend."

As I finished speaking, Madame Boussin herself, all smiles and significant glances, stepped under the awing again, and having introduced her in our English fashion to Mr. Vincent, and allowed him to excruciate her for a few minutes with his bad French accent, I suggested the propriety of our parting, lest the long *tête-à-tête* we had held should become a matter of scandal in that very scandalous town.

During our drive home, Madame Boussin was wonderfully merciful, and when I assured her

Mr. Vincent was nothing more to me than an esteemed acquaintance, paid me the rare compliment (in France) of believing my word.

On our arrival we found Madame la Comtesse strolling on the terrace with a very fashionable looking gentleman (apparently a few years younger than herself) whom she presented to us slightly as her brother from Paris, "Monsieur Auguste Vermont."

END OF VOL. II.









\_\_\_\_\_

